

'Hell Joseon'

- Tales from a South Korean Youth Trapped Between Past and Present

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Abstract

This thesis takes its outset in the newly coined expression ‘Hell Joseon’ used by the youth in South Korea. ‘Hell Joseon’ is a comparison between today’s society and the pre-modern Joseon Dynasty. By asking “what are the main characteristics of life in ‘Hell Joseon’ from a youth perspective?”, I arrive at the following conclusion. Life in ‘Hell Joseon’ is highly characterized by discrepancies between rich and poor, old and young, men and women, global and local. This is a peculiar result of Korea’s double-compressed modernity which derives from a colonial legacy, top-down modernization in the post-war era and condensed transition to a neoliberal world economy, also known as the second modernity. Therefore, traditional and (post)modern elements coexist in Korea’s society, and is partly the reason why the youth are now drawing references to the pre-modern Joseon Dynasty. Life in ‘Hell Joseon’ thus implies frustrations over high unemployment rates, a new ‘spoon class’ class division, lack of social mobility, an education fever and a downright “gender war”. More than that, it shows traces of apathy in the fact that the young generation is giving up marriage, children, jobs, hope, housing etc., but also traces of transformation since the ‘Hell Joseon’ discourse have made the youth take it to the streets, last seen in the mass demonstrations against now impeached President Park Geun-hye. Furthermore, ‘Hell Joseon’ rejects the conventional paradigm of development through nationalism and economic growth, in favour of more liberal modernization giving space for life-work balance and self-realization.

Keywords:

Compressed modernity, Hell Joseon, Youth, South Korea, Modernization, Inequality, Gender

Acknowledgements

*On a sunny November day at campus, just before noon, a young male student jumps out the window on 7th floor of the business department building at Konkuk University. In his bag, he leaves a brief note saying “I want to take a deep sleep now”. – **Seoul, 2013.***

I dedicate my thesis to this young man, and the many other young South Koreans who every year end their lives too soon, to find peace from stress, despair and confusion.

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1. Introduction

This is a story about two words, the making of an “impossible country” and a young generation feeling trapped between past and present. It takes its beginning a couple of years back when the South Korean¹ youth comes up with a short, poetic and value-laden expression that sums up the many feelings they have accumulated towards their country. ‘Hell Joseon’, they say, arguing that today’s Korea is a living hell resembling the life conditions under the Joseon Dynasty - a feudal kingdom where social hierarchies ruled over people’s fate (Park 2016; Park 2015; Koo 2015, Kim 2016, 39; Kirk 2016, Chang 2015).

I heard the expression for the first time a while back, in 2015, when I was driving home a late night in Seoul with my brother in law. He was telling me about a new prognosis showing that in order to buy a small apartment in Seoul as a young person, you would have to save up your entire salary for more than 20 years. He sighed, laughed a little and exclaimed - this is ‘Hell Joseon’. From an increasing number of articles using the term, ‘Hell Joseon’ appears to be a reaction against the rising economic inequality in Korea, prospects of record-high youth unemployment, an overheated education system and working hours longer than in most other countries in the world. (Jin 2015; Kong 2016; Kim 2016a; Fifield 2016). As one of my friends described to me once, when I asked him about the expression:

“‘Hell Joseon’ is the passive way of expressing our anger, giving some cynical smile to our society. We use the term to sympathize with each other’s situation. I don’t think the term has any actual power of change in society, but it acts as a storage of our anger. When it comes to a situation like the ‘candlelight revolution’², people take out their anger and head to the plaza. (Appendix 6)”

1.1 Aim and research question:

In this thesis, I set forth an attempt to elucidate the feelings towards life in Korea, more specifically in Seoul, with a starting point in ‘Hell Joseon’. I hope to find out where this anger comes from, what life episodes the youth connect to the expression, and how they navigate in this perceived “hell”. The aim is not to conclude whether life is an actual “living hell” in Korea or not. Rather, I intend to engage in a discussion about life based on their premises, that ‘Hell Joseon’ actually exists, so to speak. The aim from here is to understand how a whole

¹ Hereafter “Korea” and “Korean” refers to “South Korea” and “South Korean”.

² The Candlelight Revolution refers to the mass-demonstrations carried out in autumn and winter 2016 in Korea, resulting in the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye (Delury 2017).

generation of young people has arrived at this conclusion, and why. I therefore ask the following research question: **What are the main characteristics of life in ‘Hell Joseon’ from a youth perspective?**

1.2 Statement of purpose:

The 21st century has thus far been characterized by a global experience of rising economic inequality and other perceived transnational risks, and Korea is no exception (Piketty 2015; Koo 2007). Yet, too little research is aimed at accounting for the consequences of these global trends on a smaller scale, and how they might affect countries differently based on their prior experiences with economic growth. The popular “Miracle on the Han River” narrative in the case of Korea seems outdated and calls for a more suitable successor. Could the story of ‘Hell Joseon’ be next in line? Over the last decade, Korea has been infamous for having the absolute highest suicide rate per capita in the OECD and some of the lowest scores of subjective happiness amongst the youth, causing more than 25% of high school students last year to experience suicidal thoughts (OECD 2017; Byun 2017; Jeong 2016). Meanwhile, the fertility rate in Korea is currently one of the lowest in the world, and in a recent survey, 8 out of 10 respondents would try their luck abroad if given the chance. Hence, it would not be an overstatement to conclude that Korea is experiencing what is considered the darker side of the ‘Janus faced modernity’ (Hwang and Lim 2015, 80). By accounting for how a handful of young Koreans living in Seoul perceive their lives and future, this thesis adds a crucial point to the understanding of Korea's experience with development, modernity and inequality.

2. Research design

The overall design of the thesis is build up around a case study of the life as a young citizen in Korea’s capital city, Seoul, where 10 million people live today (Bryman 2012, 66-72; Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2017). Although ‘Hell Joseon’ is unique in the sense that you will not find any direct translation of the expression in other countries - there are undoubtedly expressions out there reminding of it. The term “Ghost Island” in Taiwan is one good example of this (Hong, 2016). Also, Korea is generally considered to be just one out of a handful of so-called “tiger economies” in East Asia which more or less reached the same level of modernity by applying similar development strategies (Harris 2014, 42). Therefore, the symptoms of ‘Hell Joseon’ could turn out to be similar in other “tiger nations”. Lastly, Korea is by any means far from the only country in the 21st century experiencing a rising inequality and youth unemployment. From a wider perspective, a comparison between reactions,

feelings and articulations of these tendencies in different countries could be helpful to understand the problem from a global angle. With that being said, the purpose is not specifically to set up a research where my findings are generalizable. Instead, a satisfying level of “analytical generalization” should be the main outcome (Bryman 2012, 71). Yet, I hope my findings will inspire and motivate academia to carry out similar research, to give voice to some of the many young citizens inheriting the consequences of a turbulent globalization and prior development projects carried in on local, national, regional or global levels. As mentioned already, the thesis is not an attempt to frame Korea as either a “hell” or a “heaven” by simply presenting statistics or hard data related to the topics of ‘Hell Joseon’. Rather, I intend to let the tales of ‘Hell Joseon’ come to the fore by carrying out an empirical study based on a qualitative data collection and analysis. This is why I pose a “what” question for my thesis. In this sense, and because ‘Hell Joseon’ is still in the infant stage of research, I find it suitable to approach it from an inductive point of view - moving from phenomenon to theory (Bryman 2012, 26). Before going into details with the methods, the next section will account for epistemological considerations driving the methodological, theoretical and analytical aspects of the thesis.

2.1 Epistemological considerations:

This thesis is essentially regarding ‘Hell Joseon’ as a rhetorical utterance while the mere sum of Korea’s complex development can be seen as the rhetorical situation in which the expression occurs. However, this view opens up for a serious epistemological discussion - do rhetoric create our reality, or does reality create our rhetoric? Or put more directly, is ‘Hell Joseon’ a product of Korea’s society, or is ‘Hell Joseon’ in fact shaping the meaning of life in Korea? In one corner of the ring, Lloyd F. Bitzer is known for his believe that any “rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation (Bitzer 1968, 8)”, and that such a situation consists of “a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance (Ibid, 4)”. Since ‘Hell Joseon’ is a fluid expression used by a large scale of different actors in private and public spaces, what is most interesting about the situation is this context is the exigence that calls for a “fitting” response. According to Bitzer, exigences “are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience (Ibid, 11)”.

Does this mean that everyone are agreeing to the observation that Korea is equal to ‘Hell Joseon’? If there was an “objective” exigence situated in Korea’s modern society calling for the precise articulation of ‘Hell Joseon’ - then how come Park Geun-hye expressed her

concern over the term in a speech to the public last year? On Independence Day last August, Park is remembered for giving the following statement, allegedly aimed at ‘Hell Joseon’:

“There are some newly coined words popular with the public. They are designed to ignore our proud modern history and cast Korea as a hard place to live ... Self-depreciation and pessimism will never bring us development” (Yeo 2016)

In a strong contrast to Bitzer’s theory, Richard Vatz argues that communication cannot be determined by *one* specific context, since “one never runs out of context” and “one never runs out of facts to describe a situation” (Vatz 1973, 156). Therefore, a situation or exigence does not contain any “objective” meaning in itself. Only by selecting certain micro-events, experiences and episodes from the pool of endless fragments of reality can we construct a meaningful situation. For every exigence we choose to address, we leave out a thousand others that will never become “real” to us. As Vatz concludes, “meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors (Vatz 1973, 157)”. From this social constructivist point of view, ‘Hell Joseon’ is a way to make sense of the presumable complex life as a youth in Korea, by weaving a lot of impressions, experiences and opinions together in one expression. This concept reminds of other communication theories such as “emplotment” in narratology or “sense-making” and “framing” which are similar tools or mechanisms enabling individuals and groups to “construct their environment in and through interactions with others” (Schultz & Wehmeier 2010, 12).

For the purpose of my thesis, it seems helpful to position myself between these two radical epistemologies, acknowledging that not just one objective, but a range of fragments of reality are leading the articulation of certain wordings, and that those wordings simultaneously is influencing our perception of these fragments of reality into one main narrative.

2.2 Methodology

As stated in the overall design, my research is driven by an empirical case study of life in Korea from a youth Perspective. I am therefore relying mostly on primary data collected in the field. I will nevertheless supply my findings with secondary data from news articles and academic papers. It should be mentioned that very little to non research has thus far been conducted on the subject of ‘Hell Joseon’, and given its newly emergence, secondary data is very scarce. For my collection of primary data, I carried out a micro-ethnographic fieldwork in Seoul, South Korea in January 2017 (Bryman 2012, 433). While I was there, I participated in a two-weeks Human Rights course at Seoul National University. This gave me a valuable

insight in life around campus and specific access to academic material helpful for my thesis. During my stay, I lived with my Korean family and spent time visiting friends, participating in the ongoing mass demonstrations against former president Park Geun-hye, following news and trying to get as many impressions and conversations as possible. In my style of selecting a proper theoretical framework I draw on Kings (2015, 44) method of “jobbing” where I borrow theories and concepts from different fields of study, such as sociology, economy and communication. This was done to arrive at the most comprehensive and dense understanding of my subject - life in the perceived ‘Hell Joseon’.

2.2.1 Semi structured qualitative interviews

During my four weeks in Seoul, I conducted six qualitative semi-structured interviews with Koreans in the age span between twenty-five to thirty-five. I had set up two interviews before coming to Korea, and relied on my network in Seoul to find the rest of my informants. After I came back, I carried out two additional interviews with young Koreans whom I met in Copenhagen through my network. This means a mix of snowball sampling and before scheduled meetings (Bryman 2012, 424). The reason why I chose a semi-structured approach was to keep my options open, as I expected my informants to have very different perspectives on the expression ‘Hell Joseon’. The reason why I take use of a qualitative approach is found in the epistemological realization that ‘Hell Joseon’ is a matter of constructing meaning from events, which in itself cannot be confined quantitatively. Again my ‘what’ question for the research implies a qualitative approach (ibid, 385). As an interviewer, I see my own position as co-producer of the data I collect, in the sense that I cannot put myself out of the equation. This goes in line with Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2009, 48-49) idea of a traveller. Thus,

“the potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveller’s interpretations of the narratives he or she brings back to home audiences”

From this realization, I had to take an active choice of presenting myself as an “insider” or “outsider” to my informants. Each approach would give widely different results.

Therefore, the interviews were started by informing that I have background knowledge about Korea, so the informants feel more comfortable during the interview and not being afraid of using Korean word for specific phenomenon. I also assessed that by presenting myself as a student specifically interested in Korea’s prior development and politics and youth, I could arrive at more sophisticated answers and conversations.

After transcribing my interviews, I intend to classify them and divide them into themes and sub-themes, to make the findings as comprehensive as possible for my content analysis. The analysis will therefore be carried out in themes, driven by statements from informants and juxtaposed against my theoretical framework.

2.2.2 Ethical considerations

I conducted eight interviews and among them were five recorded and the other three were not. Recording and as well note-taking was operated with the permission from the interviewees and in the very beginning of the interview. I also informed them that they would appear as anonymous in my thesis, with new names and no revealing information presented in the analysis. This is important since I do not want to compromise the security or reputation of my informants in country where politics and anti-nationalism are still frowned upon in some communities and institutions.

Another consideration was to be careful about using the word ‘Hell-Joseon’ since I was aware that some Koreans are very sensitive about the word. I therefore made sure beforehand, by using my existing network, that the interviewees were familiar with the interview topic. I did not want to surprise them by suddenly bringing it up.

2.2.3 Limitations

Three of the interviews among eight were not recorded. I tried to write it down after the interviews what interviewees said with their own language. However, I did not remember everything, therefore there might be some statements that would happen to be affected by my own interpretation. Another limitation is that all the interviewees were able to communicate in English which means that they are rather educated and classified as specific socio-economic status in the society. Also, although I presented myself as an “inside” outsider, so to speak, there might still be concepts or aspects of the complex narratives I picked up which I have understood or misinterpreted. Also, their answers given to me cannot but be influenced by the fact that I am a foreigner. It could be a force, since they might open more up to me and are eager to get their story “out” in the open, but it could also be hindrance if they are afraid of presenting their country, family, workplace etc. in a bad light.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 From a “hell-hole of foreign assistance” to “miraculous” development

Before defining a theoretical framework suitable for my analysis, we ought to take a closer look at Korea’s modern history in terms of economic growth and heightening of living standards. Accounting for Korea’s development from this perspective adds to our understanding of ‘Hell Joseon’ in the sense that sometimes there can be no “hell” without a normative “heaven”.

As the popular story goes, Korea has undergone a miraculous economic transformation and modernization since the country’s foundation in 1948 (Stiglitz 1996; Weiss 2005;). It was accepted in the OECD in 1996 and became a member of OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2009 (Chun et. al 2010, 788; Adelman 2007, 9). While the GNP grew from 1.3 billion USD in 1953 to 1,304 billion USD in 2013, the GNP per capita exceeded 25,000 USD in 2013 - compared to just 67 USD in 1953 (Lim 2015, 10). From the 60s to the 80s, Korea enabled an average GNP growth rate of 8.5 percent per year which made it “the fastest growing economy in the world” at that time (Kim 2004, 210). The educational system and health care system were both vastly expanded and improved during the first decades of rapid development, which meant that high school enrolment during the 70s went from less than 600,000 to 2.5 million and the life expectancy rose from 53 in 1960 to 65 in 1965, 8 in 1980 (The World Bank, 2017). Today, the enrolment rate at high school level is 93 percent, more than 80% of high school graduates proceeds to take a university degree, and with a life expectancy of 82, the Korean men and women can expect to live some of the longest lives in the world (Statista 2017; Cho 2010, 445; The world bank, 2017).

In that sense, South Korea has truly achieved something unprecedented; moving away from severe “underdevelopment” and into the “club” of strong and developed countries in less than half a century, becoming the first major recipient of foreign aid which is now a substantial donor itself (Adelman 2007, 1; Chun et al. 2010, 788-789). Another implication of this miracle lies in the realization that Korea not only achieved record-breaking growth rates for decades - but did so with a remarkable notion of equity too, avoiding what has been named the “Kuznets curve” of inevitable economic inequality during growth (Stiglitz 1996; Adelman 2007, 1; Feng 2011; Lee, Lee & Park 2014, 241). However, before becoming an OECD country and significant donor itself, Korea received 12.8 billion USD in foreign aid (Chun et al. 2010, 789), and although it might seem unreal today, the country was not given the most

favourable odds to succeed. According to Adelman, the “foreign aid establishment” gave Korea nicknames such as the “bottomless pit” and the “hell-hole of foreign assistance” during the 1960s (Adelman 2007, 2). In the same period, most economists were in fact expecting the Philippines to become the first newly industrialized economy in Asia next to Japan (CBO 1997,1). Such a prediction was based on the fact that the Philippines was the richer, had a larger population and was “blessed” by abundant natural resources, as opposed to Korea which only resource was its people (*ibid*). Nevertheless, Korea is no longer called a “hopeless case” but the “impossible country” - in the “positive” sense that it achieved the impossible (Tudor 2012, 10-11).

As impressive and indisputable Korea’s unprecedented and record-setting growth rates and development might appear, they do, nevertheless, not tell us awfully a lot about the society in which they were achieved. Hence, from this narrative alone, it would be convenient to simply just write off the notion of ‘Hell Joseon’ as pure fiction fabricated by an ungrateful and spoiled youth. In all respects, similar to the rhetoric Park Geun-hye put forth in her speech last year. Regardless its appropriateness or not, it would, however, still leave us in the dark about the answer to the research question posed in this thesis - what are the characteristics of life in ‘Hell Joseon’ from a youth perspective? To answer this question, I now move on to the task of building up a suitable theoretical framework from which we can look at life in ‘Hell Joseon’ and perhaps better understand the underlying root causes of the many feelings, experiences and opinions articulated.

3.2 An ontology of multiple modernities

A good place to start is with the discussion about modernity - the sociological idea of a “societal manifestation” or “historical social formation” originating from the Renaissance era and the seventeenth century evolution of science (Lim 2015, 4; Hettne 2009, 11). To Giddens, modernity can be explained as “modes of social life or organizations which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence (Chang 2006, 346). Modernity is intrinsically related to the modernization imperative which is the quest for a society of mass consumption, political liberalism and economic efficiency, “not unlike that of the mid-twentieth century United States”. A society built up around the principles of meritocracy, where people succeed because of their abilities rather than “traditional” roles “ascribed to them by virtue of their position in their family, tribe or other kinship group” (Harris 2014, 40). “To be modern was to be rational and ‘positive’” - the opposite of traditional and religious (Hettne 2009, 11).

However, the “traditional” notion of modernity as inherently a process of “westernization” draws sharp associations to an ethnocentric or (neo)colonial perspective and has - even more importantly - failed to bear out in practice when considering the global development following World War II.

“While a general trend toward structural differentiation developed across a wide range of institutions in most of these societies - in family life, economic and political structures, urbanization, modern education, mass communication, and individualistic orientations - the ways in which these arenas were defined and organized varied greatly, in different periods of their development, giving rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns (Eisenstadt 2000, 1-2).”

With these words, a new ontology of “multiple modernities” was born, giving space for discussing various modernization projects throughout the globe from a more indigenous point of view (*ibid*). Although the initial Western project remained the overall reference point, the new patterns were distinctively different, formed by specific cultural premises, traditions and important historical events (*ibid*, 2). The concept of “multiple modernities” therefore strongly suggest that modernity and Westernization are not identical - and that Western modernity is the not the only “authentic” version, but simply just the first one (*ibid*, 3-4).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Compressed modernity in Korea

The ontology of modernities in plural comes in handy when dealing with Korea’s experience of modernization and lays the foundation for my theoretical framework. While Western scholarship has predominantly framed Korea’s development as “an ideal place for an emergent modernity” following a western prototype, a more critical view on Korea’s modernity has emerged since the late 1990s driven by Eastern scholars (*Lim & Hwang, 2015, 74*). One of the most prominent theories is coined “compressed modernity”, which implies the formation of a

“civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner in respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements

leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system (Chang 2010a, 6)”.

Although Korea has grown into the 12th largest economy in the world today, only recently surpassed by Russia (IMF 2017), one should not neglect its history of colonial oppression and post-war influence from external forces. The main argument behind “compressed modernity” is therefore that whereas development came from “within” or as bottom-up process in most Western cases, development in post-war Korea has by large been a top-down, elitist project defined and confined by its colonial history and position within the larger world-system (Calhoun 2010; Lim & Hwang 2015; Pirie 2008; Han & Shim, 2010). That fact that Korea may have, as an exception to the rule, made it from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘core’ in this world system does not make its modernization more ‘Western’ than any other path dependent former third-world country (Klak 2015, 195). Especially due to the fact that an “indigenous social revolution” never materialized in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, feudal social hierarchies and “cultural order” were never fully eradicated (Chang 2010a, 7).

The result today is thereby a situation where traditional and (post)modern elements not just coexist, but constantly compete, collide and disjoint (Chang 2010a, 6-7; Lim & Hwang 2015, 76-77, Lim 2015, 4). Known as the “simultaneity of non-simultaneous matters”, these clashes take place in economic, political, cultural and familial spheres (Chang 2010b, 16). The result is a “stress field” or tension in which citizens constantly have to act flexibly and often contradictory in order “to remain normally integrated with the rest of society (*ibid*, 6)”. Chang explains it like this:

“When West-originated social institutions, values, and goals are attained in condensed manners, or when they are compressively compounded with traditional and indigenous elements, their discontinuous – or, more correctly, dissimilar – nature in the South Korean context cannot but be responsible for social confusion, conflict, and alienation (*ibid*, 10).”

Besides from the very obvious fact that ‘Hell Joseon’ is a Korean expression, the argument behind - that today’s modern Korea is comparable to the pre-modern Joseon Dynasty - makes Chang’s theory of compressed modernity highly suitable in explaining the experience of a life in ‘Hell Joseon’ from a youth perspective. The next section offers a brief explanation of how compressed modernity more specifically came into being in the case of Korea.

4.2 Compressed modernity in the making - Eastern spirit, Western body

First of all, it is important to point out that today's experience of modernity was far from a predestined outcome. In fact, during the early stage of nation building in the late 19th century, Korea experienced a wave of a more "universalistic" version of modernity. As Shin explains,

"in its formative years, civic, political and individualistic elements competed with ethnic, cultural and collectivistic ideas in determining the ideological basis of the new modern Korean nation" (Shin 2006, 115-116).

At that time, certain intellectual movements saw civic rights and individualism as a major mean to achieve a strong Korea (*ibid*, 118). However, what has come to be known as the "dark side of modernity" may have had a crucial influence on how Korea further developed (Hettne 2009, 35; Goga 2015). As Hettne argues, development is traditionally driven by three main ideals or political values - freedom, order or justice (Hettne 2009, 14). Whereas "freedom" could have been the main ideal in the early stage, thirty-five years of Japanese colonization followed by a process of liberation, national division, the Korean War and the Cold War put an end to that option for good (Shin 2006, 132; Lim & Hwang 2015, 78). Rather, a strong wish for order, survival and national sovereignty was now the main motivation for Korea to chase development and modernity (Shin 2006, 41; Moon & Jin 2011, 132-139; Cho 2000, 50-51; Klak 2014, 195).

4.2.1 Colonial modernity?

Hence, by the time Korea began its modernization, a strong nexus between security and industrialization was prevalent - one could call it a "modernization or perish" kind of mentality, where security and independence were entirely dependent on a successful capitalist transformation and rapid economic growth (Hettne 2009, 47-50). With the new perceived enemy in the North, the US and the Korean elite were able to re-frame prior collaborators during the colonial era as anti-communist and thus managed to reinstate them into the bureaucratic system and police force (Lim & Hwang 2015, 78; Pirie 2008, 62). It is also worth noticing that the traditional rural elites kept an important role in the colonial project, while the urban-based merchant bourgeoisie had very little mandate to develop any form for native capital in the industrial sector. This human legacy, together with the institutional and material inheritance enabled Korea to establish a "listian warfare state" which to a great extent shared the Japanese ethos of the hypermilitarized, bureaucratized and suppressive colonial state (Moon & Jun 2011, 138; Cho 2000, 50-51; Pirie 2008, 60-64). On the other

hand, Korea could not have rolled out this authoritarian developmentalist project without the help from its American allies. This has made Pirie conclude that

“The modern post-colonial Korean state was in many respects no less an externally created structure than the colonial state it replaced. The state’s ‘fiscal base’ was US-aid, the first Korean president was a US placeman, and the new institutions were constructed around the old structures of the colonial state (Pirie 2008, 63).

Throughout Korea’s development, the US kept its important role by coming to the rescue with financial support and, more importantly, providing an imitable industrial framework, economic ideology, technology, military support and access to a affluent market during the 60s, 70s and 80s (Cho 2000, 50; Kim 2004). Most of Korea’s economic, political and even pedagogic spheres have been strongly influenced by American academia and schooling (Chang 2010a, 30-33).

4.2.2 Modernization as a nationalistic project?

However, the “revolution from above” needed a strong glue to keep the patchwork together. This was found in ethnic nationalism. While industrialization, export-led growth and guided “capitalism” were the main components in Korea’s “national survival” (Moon & Jun 2011, 116), a strong ethnic nationalism proved helpful in soothing the public fear of cultural perish. Under the pretext of “restoring dignity” of the past, Korean leaders instrumentalized nationalism and promoted indigenous culture to organize, mobilize and motivate the population (Chang 2010b, 22; Kim 2004, 208). Via nationalism, the Confucian respect for hierarchy, harmony and loyalty went from being a hinderance of capitalism to now promoting it, under the slogan of “modernization of the fatherland” (Shin 2006, 14).

In particular, this strategy has become known as *dongdoseogi* - “Eastern philosophy - Western instrument” (Chang 2010b, 23). From this perspective, nationalism has played a crucial role in constructing Korea’s modernity which still is - despite waves of democratization and globalization - unable to move beyond these nationalist notions of self-sacrificial and neglect of individual rights (Shin 2006, 133). The prevailing dominance of nationalism attached to development gives us reason to ask

“to what extent is the meaning of modernity appropriated by the developmental state accepted, contested or subverted by those who are mobilized under it by it in the name of national modernization (Moon 2005, 2)?”

4.3 From hopes of a liberal subject to the birth of the neoliberal subject

In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis which hit Korea in 1997, Cho (2000, 50) argues the obsession with economic growth has left the population in “an extreme state of both physical and mental exhaustion”. Moreover, the compressed mode of modernity has left little time for reflection and modern system building (*ibid*, 53). In line with these findings, Han and Shim conclude that

“The preoccupation with rapid modernization has destroyed the wisdom of balance. Far more emphasis has been placed on speed rather than procedure, size rather than substance, quantity rather than quality and so on (Han & Shim 2010, 474)”.

Cho is, nevertheless, still an optimist at this time. She sees an opportunity for a paradigmatic change driven by an alternative view on development. The birth of a reflexive, critical and liberal subject is on the verge, she thinks (Cho 2000, 61). Fifteen years later, she has given up on the idea of a cultural liberalization movement (Cho 2015, 440). Instead, the new birth of “neoliberal subjects” has taken over, and the youth in Korea are slowly realizing “they can study and labor until they burn out as “willing slaves,” or they can (un)willingly flee the world of overwork and excessive self- exploitation (*ibid*, 458).”

Cho’s analysis of two generations’ changing attitude towards life and work indicates strongly that something beyond Korea’s initial experience with compressed modernity has distorted social conditions even more.

4.4 Second modernity and reflexive cosmopolitization

To link the implications of Korea’s compressed modernization imperative to the youth’s frustration with today’s society, we therefore need to add another and “more fresh” layer to our understanding of the Korean modernity. As implied by Cho’s observations, a fundamental change takes place in the 1990s. While Korea at this point has somehow “fulfilled” its transformation into a modern society with capitalist, liberal and democratic consolidation, the whole world is concurrently rushing into a new stage of modernity - the so called “second modernity” (Chang 2010d, 319). According to Beck (2016, 258), this second modernity is a “fundamental transformation of society and politics *within* modernity itself”, as some sort of modernity project 2.0. There is an inevitable irony in the fact that what used to be considered “modern” is now outdated and seen as “traditional” itself.

The shift to the second stage of modernity comes on the heels of globalization and neoliberalism where a “world risk society” has manifested itself with the change from national distribution of “goods” to a transnational distribution of “bads” (*ibid*; Chang 2010c, 445). While some of these “bads” are natural risks such as climate change and “borderless ecological and epidemiological hazards”, this newest wave of globalization is also affecting the life of “ordinary people” by rising levels of economic inequality, joblessness and irregular work all over the globe (Han & Shim 2010, 471). This “new stage of human civilization” is driven by forces of global free trade, deindustrialization, corporate transnationalism, digitalization, urbanization, migration and asymmetric, regional warfare (Chang 2010d, 321). Hence, it implies a:

“civilizational condition in which various (mostly negative) ‘side-effects’ of (first) modernity add up to a qualitatively different situation in which the fundamental values of first modernity are still respected, but have to be pursued with radically different social means and institutions under a cosmopolitan paradigm (Chang 2010d, 320-321).”

The notion of second modernity strongly suggests that whereas the 20th century modernization projects resulted in “multiple modernities” - second modernity is - whether we like it or not - pulling these multiple modernities closer together in a homogenizing sense. Another implication of the globalizing forces driving second modernity is the rise of a “reflexive” modernization or cosmopolitization process (Han & Shim 2010; Beck 2016). This idea suggests a new process of reflexivity of what modernity is, and should be. As a positive result of globalization, we are capable of examining the hitherto results of modernity within our own sphere and juxtapose them to other areas or regions in the world (Beck 2016, 260; Han & Shim 2010, 481). However, Beck argues that before we can start a process of real transformation, social groups first go through a phase of denial, simply rejecting the new and “shared” world risks, and a phase of apathy, resembling a radical postmodern nihilism (Beck 2016, 264). So, what has reflexive modernization and the transition to second modernity meant from a Korean perspective, known for its uniquely compressed modernity?

4.5 A double-compressed modernity in Korea?

The initial conditions of the compressed path to “first modernity” in Korea are far from irrelevant, as second modernity seems to be feeding on the negative side-effects from these.

Naturally, there has been different responses and transitions to second modernity - some countries might have been better suited than others for a sudden globalization and

monopolistic free market economy than others. Han and Shim (2010, 471) argues that the case of East Asia differs from that of the west, since risks in second modernity “are produced as consequences of the deficiencies built into the rush-to strategy of development in East Asia”. A good example is the “growth first - distribution later” strategy which has been omnipresent throughout most of Korea’s modernization and has outsourced the traditional social security functions of the state to the family (Lee, Lee & Park 2014, 244). Beck (2016, 267) therefore suggest that in second modernity, “families are *not* confronted with fewer functions and burdens”, “they have become functionally overloaded and socially risk-ridden”.

Just like Korea’s early experience with modernization, its move into second modernity is similarly a result of mixed nationalist developmentalism and strong dependency on the western hegemonic world order. Even more, the shift is happening under equally compressed manners, leading us to the truly peculiar notion of a “double-compressed modernity”. As Chang explains,

“in East Asia, second modernity has arrived in a post-compressed modern context, but this arrival itself has been extremely condensed, constituting another symptom of compressed modernity (Chang 2010d, 319).”

The shift towards a second modernity and are more or less perceived as out of the hands of the individual nation-states. Whereas the traditional understanding of modernity implied a “industrialize or perish” mentality, Beck now identifies a “cooperate or fail” paradigm in which nations cannot but accept the interconnectivity of the world (Beck 2016, 261). The “other” is already in our midst, he claims: isolationism and national fundamentalism are doomed to fail (*ibid*).

A such view on modernity calls for the rejection of “methodological nationalism” - similar to the concept of a “post-westphalian era” (Fraser 2007; Beck 2016, 262). Nevertheless, the Korean experience with second modernity and neoliberalism has been no less of a nationalist developmentalist project as compared to the initial modernization strategy accounted for in the prior sections (Chang 2010d, 321-322). Korea’s way into second modernity was promoted under a clear nationalist agenda, in the attempt to link globalization with a new ‘Koreanization’. Once again, Confucian values received newfound attention from a top-down approach, proving the “Korean body, Western utensils” paradigm continuously relevant (Shin 2006, 2008). One good example of Korea’s nationalist approach to globalization is found in the following statement presented by former President Kim Dae-Jung:

“Koreans cannot become global citizens without a good understanding of their own culture and tradition. Koreans should march out into the world on the strength of their unique culture and traditional values. Only when the national identity is maintained and intrinsic national spirit upheld will Koreans be able to successfully globalize (Shin 2006, 215).

All in all, this means that rather than levelling out the inconsistencies between tradition and (post)modernism in Korea, second modernity has thus far been a process of pushing these entities further away and towards each other, enhancing the notion of confusion and complexity related to social navigation in today’s society. For this reason, I find a theoretical framework drawing on ideas linked to Korea’s first and second experience of compressed modernity useful in explaining how life in the perceived ‘Hell Joseon’ is experienced from a youth perspective.

Let us now turn to the analysis of life in ‘Hell Joseon’ and see if how Korea’s experience of double-compressed modernity and nationalized globalization has affected the minds of the young generation.

5. ANALYSIS OF A LIFE IN ‘HELL JOSEON’ FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

5.1 Chapter 1: The many faces of ‘Hell Joseon’

When I start my interview with Dan-oh she admits to me that she might be an atypical Korean since she managed to “escape Korea” temporarily for a three-year college degree in the US a while back. Perhaps that is why she did not really believe in “Hell Joseon” in the beginning and she believed “if you try hard enough, you are going to achieve something.” When Dan-oh returned to Korea, she did not expect to settle for good, and she spent her first two years fooling around in her hometown Daegu, singing in a band. But, as time went on, she changed her mind and decided to find a job in Seoul. During her first two years in Seoul while trying to become a journalist, she lived in a “Goshiwon” - an infamous type of one-room studio with nothing but a desk, chair and bed. As Dan-oh recalls, “it was not designed for a person to live in.. it was suffocating”. During her job seeking, she - just like many others youngsters today - joined a “study group” where everyone helps each other with preparing for the job entry exams and interviews. Even though the members in the group were rivals, they needed

each other too. And as time went on, they ended up building strong bonds. After two years of intense trying, Dan-oh was recently hired by one of the major broadcasting companies in Seoul, and she has now moved out of the “goshiwon”. But the experience has changed her. “I have seen these amazing people who are still unemployed and I couldn't believe like “why are these people not employed so far?” I think that is when I really started to understand why we call it ‘Hell Joseon’.

As Dan-oh’s story testifies, ‘Hell Joseon’ implies a life where even the best qualifications cannot bring you certainty or high hopes for the future. It also involves a fierce competition amongst the youth itself, which creates an ambiguous feeling of common despair and constant rivalry. In the end, it is the feeling of injustice. That even though you have the right credentials - or *specs* (specifications) as the youth say - you are still not sure if you are ‘in’ or ‘out’. These feelings have made the newly recruited government official Hyo-jung, come to the conclusion that:

“Maybe twenty years ago, you could be rich and successful if you worked hard, took an education and did well. Today it is more about what kind of background your family has (Appendix 4)”

‘Hell Joseon’ is thus touching a lot of different streams of today’s society, which I will quickly try to sum up here. To Dan-oh, ‘Hell Joseon’ is bottomline a question of inequality, socially and economically. To Yong-ju, a self-declared conservative, ‘Hell Joseon’ is the story of an unfinished development, calling for further economic growth and modernization. To Si-won, the column writer at an online news magazine, the political landscape of Korea fits the notion of ‘Hell Joseon’ the best. To Kyung-jin, a sociologist student from Seoul National University, ‘Hell Joseon’ is the feeling of a sharp division between men and women. To Hyun-woo, the white-collar worker, ‘Hell Joseon’ is also related to the ‘bad’ working culture in Korea and his time spent in military service. Although vastly different in their starting points, the stories do however have one thing in common - the feeling of being trapped between past and present, between modern and pre-modern, between local and global.

This is what makes the ‘Hell Joseon’ such a fascinating expression and yet so difficult to grasp - even for the young Koreans themselves. To give it a fancy label, ‘Hell Joseon’ has somewhat become an ‘open source’ narrative for the youth, helping them to sort out and categorize some of the challenges they stumble upon in everyday life. This, in turn, is one of

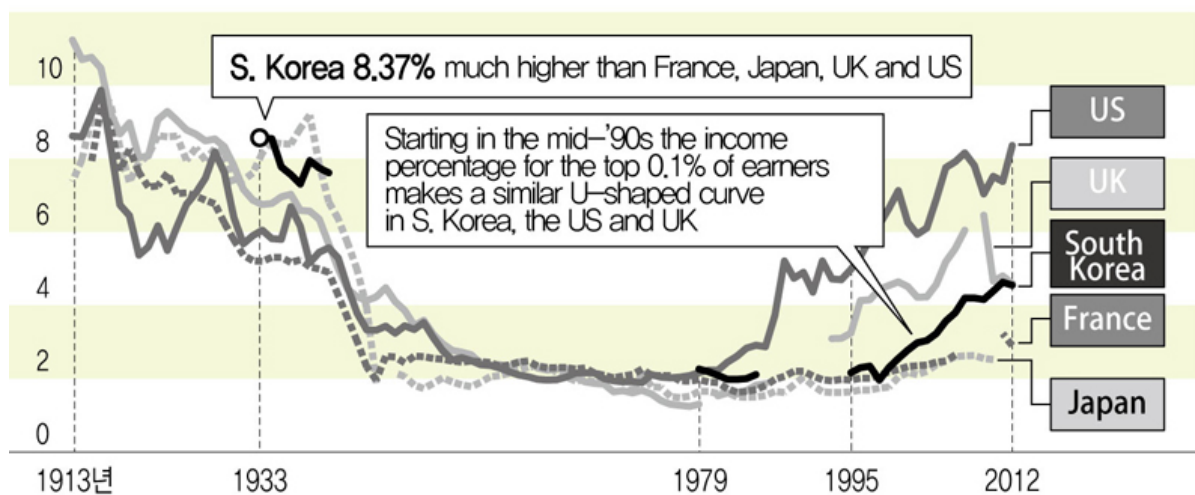
the reasons why the theory of a double-compressed modernity in Korea seems so fitting to analyse what is going on within the conceptual walls of ‘Hell Joseon’.

5.2 Chapter 2: Inequality in Korea – The ‘one shot society’ they call ‘Hell Joseon’

“So the reason why I thought this is “Hell Joseon”, really “Hell Joseon” is.. uhm. There is one term in Korean “one shot society”. If you fail once, you are done. I think the Wall Street Journal or something called Korea a ‘one shot society’ and I completely agree with that. If you fail once, you are a loser. (Appendix 5)”

The income percentage for the top 0.1% of earners since 1900

Data: Kim Nak-nyun, World Top Incomes Database (unit: %)



The income percentage for the top 0.1% of earners since 1900. Data: Kim Nak-nyun, World Top Incomes Database (unit: %)

(Source: The Hankyoreh, 2015)

As mentioned briefly in both the introduction and theoretical framework, inequality in Korea has been on the rise ever since the transition to second modernity, especially marked by the financial crisis in 1997 and onward (Kong 2012; Koo 2007; Chang 2010a; Cho 2015; Pirie 2008; Samy 2014). In fact, inequality in Korea today is the most severe out of all twenty-two countries in the Asia-Pacific area. Before this trend became prevalent, the Korean economy was characterized by its strong middle-class where as much as two thirds of all Koreans saw themselves belonging (Koo 2007, 1). After the crisis, in the period between 2001 to 2010, 73% of men belonging to the middle-class when they were in their 50s had fallen out of this class by their 60s (Jin 2015). This eradication of middle-class citizens is especially seen in the

share of income, where the top 10 percent of income earners in Korea are taking a staggering 45 percent of the total income (Kim 2016a). Even more, as illustrated in the above graph, we can identify a sharp rise in income share of the top 0.1 percent in Korea, which now is far higher than both France and Japan (Jin 2015). The graph also clearly points to the fact that “growth with equity” was never the “normal” mode of the Korean economy, rather the exception to the rule. Just like in the Western world, inequality was drastically eradicated and alleviated as the consequence of the World War II and Korean War, respectively (Piketty 2015, 69; Lee, Lee & Park 2014, 244;) But as the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is widening in these years, the picture of inequality is slowly beginning to resemble the pre-war era. This fact should be kept in mind throughout the rest of the analysis.

To Dan-oh, ‘Hell Joseon’ is bottom-line a matter of social and economic inequality – since it has created what she calls a ‘one shot society’ with only one chance to achieve what most are in the pursuit of; the right specifications to secure a stable job. However, as we learn from Dan-oh’s story, far from everyone are realizing their potential these days, in large due to the rising youth unemployment rate which hit 12.5 percent in February 2017 – the highest record ever since 1998 (trading economics, 2017). Therefore, as shown in the introduction, ‘Hell Joseon’ functions as a soothing expression for the youth.

“‘Hell Joseon’ is the passive way of expressing our anger, giving some cynical smile to our society. We use the term to sympathize with each other’s situation. (appendix 6)”

The anger and fear comes from this high unemployment, amongst others, which is why the expression is generally used in conversations between the youth themselves when the topic falls on employment and the future. Even for my self-proclaimed conservative informant Yong-ju, it can be hard to reject ‘Hell Joseon’ completely:

“Officially I will not (use ‘Hell Joseon’). officially i will not, but you know, when we have a light conversation between my friends, I would just mention it, maybe once or twice. After all, it's pretty hard to get a job. (appendix 2)”

5.3 Chapter 3: Education fever – choosing the right track in ‘Hell Joseon’

One of the consequences, but also reasons behind, the rising inequality and concentration of wealth is the highly competitive education system in Korea. It is no secret that Korea’s youth is highly ‘overeducated’ in today’s society (Chang 2010a, 36, Koo 2007, 11; Abelmann 2003, 140-144; Cho 2000; Cho 2015). The obsession with education dates back to the beginning of

Korea's modernization where it served as the main factor of upward mobility in a rapidly growing and transforming economy (Chang 2010a, 31). Today's problem with 'overeducation' is best explained by Chang Ha-joon (2010e), who explains phenomenon with a brilliant metaphor.

“The higher education system in these countries has become like a theatre in which some people decided to stand to get a better view, prompting others behind them to stand. Once enough people stand, everyone has to stand, which means that no one is getting a better view, while everyone has become more uncomfortable. (Chang 2010e)”

Therefore, education is not necessarily securing anything but debt unless you make it to one of the top universities, chose one the right programmes and achieve the right specifications (Cho 2015, 445).

“It is really hard to get a job except for those who majored in business or economy, economics, it's pretty prone for them to get a job, but it takes about a year, approximately a year, roughly. but those who majored in language, media, or whatever, politics. it is really hard for them to find a job. (appendix 2)”

What Yong-ju tells me is in line with the argument that Korea is a 'one-shot society'. Because of the higher rates of unemployment, irregular jobs and low-paid jobs in today's Korea, the youth have become increasingly risk-averse and cynical in their life perspective (Cho 2015, 445). Nothing is left to chance and everyone are desperately aware of the decreasing prospects of social advancement. As Hyun-woo recalls, the 'one-shot society' begins from childhood.

“Actually, in my case, I was like a serious student, a hard student. I focused on my studies to enter a good university. Some students, they just played around and visited friends, and the result was tragic (Appendix 7)”

After my fieldwork in Seoul in January 2017, I met a Korean freshman in Denmark who was the main character in a soon-to-be documentary on educational differences between Denmark and Korea. This young male had recently been in the absolute top of his generation in the Korean College Scholastic Ability Test – also known as *Suneung*. That is why the production team had wanted him to travel to Denmark and compare his own thoughts on education with the Danish youth. I had the chance to do a quick interview with in Copenhagen, and what stroke me the most was his choice of major at Seoul National University (SNU), one of the

three top-tier universities in Korea, forming the holy trinity of ‘SKY’ together with Yonsei University and Korea University (Koo 2007, 12). Almost as you could have predicted from Yong-ju’s above explanation, Chang-ho, who with his perfect exam score had the chance to choose the exact major he wanted, ended up studying business administration. He had initially wanted to graduate in political science, but his family had quickly talked him out of it – he shouldn’t “waste” his “god’s gift” on a major with low job security.

This resembles the story of Kyung-jin, who is studying sociology at Seoul National University today. Her family was likewise not excited about her choice of major, to put it mildly. When revealing her choice to her father, he responded: *"what are you doing now?", "why are you wasting your degree like this?"* (Appendix 8).

However, Kyung-jin did not conform to the norms like Chang-ho has found himself doing. In the following quotes, Kyung-jin explains why she did as she did, how it makes her feel, and how not just her father, but also friends and others have responded to it:

"Actually, I often feel that I don't really belong in this society, just because what I like and what I prefer. It sounds very vague, but I felt that way. I never felt that I wanted to step the right track that Koreans think - getting a job at conglomerates, companies, and getting married, like finding someone "good" at a certain age. I never gave a shit about that, because as you can see, I am a graduate student in sociology. That says it all. (□□) You know what people told when I told them I was going to SNU doing sociology? They were saying like "oh, you are kind of doomed". They don't see any future in me. And neither do I. I actually don't see any future in me. But I have this very beautified unrealizable dream that I hope I can do someday, so I just applied for it. (Appendix 8)".

At lot of Korea’s education zeal of today should be explained by its compressed modernity and extremely dense economic growth all the way up to the 90s. From the starting point of Korea’s development, a minimalist or “developmentalist” welfare state forced its citizens to mobilize into ‘social investment families’ where parents and children have been heavily relying on each other’s performances (Lee, Lee & Park 2014, 244; Chang 2010a, 27-35). This is still prevalent, as Si-won explains:

"Much of the cost must be born individually. Right? Korea is known for being not much of a social welfare. Especially when it comes to helping young people. (Appendix 3)".

The family has thus always played an excessive role when it comes social security and chances of class advancement. With one's future more or less dependent on educational results, the well-off families soon started supplementing the public schools with private lessons. The rest of society quickly followed suit, resulting in an educational system today which is "too competitive and too exam-oriented with a single preoccupation to prepare students for college entrance exams (Koo 2007, 12-15)". This trend started in the late 80s or early 90s, around the time Hyun-woo grew up:

"My high school was a public school, nobody listened to the teacher's word, they just slept in the class.. Me too, I had to charge my energy in the public school, and then, after school, I go to "hagwon". if the teacher is very angry or something, I don't sleep. But if the teachers are weak or.. sometimes they teachers don't care about it. "hagwon", it's private, you know. Private school, it's very expensive, I go there because the teachers in "hagwon" teach very well, and good quality, and they focus on the exam. (Appendix 7)".

However, with the financial crisis, deindustrialization and destabilization of the labour market in 1997 and onward, a lot of the 'social investment families' were brought to their knees, making it more difficult to keep up the pace of the ever-increasing educational competition (Cho 2000; Cho 2015; Chang 2010a, 45). By the end of the 20th century, middle and high-school students of Korea were already plagued by a "college entrance examination hell", desperately fighting like "warriors" for the sake of their "private profit networks" and their own social status (Cho 2000, 54-64). Again, Hyun-woo's memory of life as a student, or the lack thereof, underpins this perception:

"So, for three years in high school, I studied like a zombie in the library. I studied until 1 a.m. Then I got back to my house, got some sleep, and then I wake up at 7 a.m. and went to school again. So, I have no memory of high school, because the only thing I do was studying. I don't want to go back to high school, it was too tough. And actually, I don't want to... if I have children, I don't want them to experience the same thing (Appendix 7)".

The importance of education in the larger narrative of 'Hell Joseon' confirms the concept of a double compressed modernity. The colonial era, lack of indigenous social revolution and the influence from the US on Korea's development put education in the centre of class formation (Chang 2010a, 31-33). When Korea later on were pushed into the neoliberal wave, the

‘productive welfare state’ was insufficient and unemployment rates skyrocketed in 1998 after the 1997-financial crisis (Kong 2012, 246). Although the employment rates stabilized again relatively quickly, the pains from the crisis were far from shared equally (Chang 2010a, 45).

“Beneath the rapid employment recovery, however, occurred a structural change in employment patterns towards numerical flexibility (i.e., easing of hire and fire) in the shape of insecure and casual forms of employment (Kong 2012, 246).”

For this reason, education is no longer a possibility of upward mobility but rather a tool of class reproduction, where the one with most resources will come out as winners in most instances (Koo 2007; Abelmann 2003). The youth of today has therefore become highly sensitive to class division in society and the privileges the wealthy are enjoying. The awareness has given birth to another neology - the so called ‘spoon class theory’ of 21st century Korea.

5.4 Chapter 4: ‘Gold spoons’ and ‘dirt spoons’ - a class theory in the making

In ‘Hell Joseon’, Hyo-jung explains, people are now divided into “spoons”. A ‘golden spoon’ (*geumsujeo*) refers to a person born into wealth, while a ‘dirt spoon’ (*heoksujeo*) refers to the opposite, an underprivileged person from a family with no particular wealth or status (Kim 2016, 39-40). In between, you find ‘silver spoons’, ‘bronze spoons’, ‘copper spoons’ - or the extreme case of ‘diamond spoon’, which is reserved the absolute top of the society, as we will come to in a later section. To Dan-oh, the ‘spoon class theory’ is connected to her perception of the ‘one-shot society’ as a system unable to catch its citizens *if and when* they fall.

“I think a society which has a good resilience, like good tolerance for allowing people to fail and keep trying, this is where people thrive, right? But here, it is all decided. So in ‘Hell Joseon’, we have ‘geumsujeo’ (gold spoon) and ‘heoksujeo’ (dirt spoon), right? Because money matters, more and more. That is how I perceive the word ‘Hell Joseon’, and I think Korea is ‘Hell Joseon’. (Appendix 5)”

Although Dan-oh does not like to use the terms herself, as it would put a certain blame on her parents for not “having a lot of money”, she still thinks the top of society would enjoy the ‘gold spoon’ label given to them.

“When you are a ‘geumsujeo’ (gold spoon) here in Korea, nothing is going hurt you. People always respect you, and admire you, so even if I was a daughter in a ‘geumsujeo’ (gold spoon) family, I was going like that word. (Appendix 5)”

The ‘spoon class theory’ is even newer than the term ‘Hell Joseon’ and adds to our understanding of how the youth are making up a whole new vocabulary corresponding to their feelings and experiences with life in these years. Behind the ‘spoon class’ articulation is also an anger with how the ‘gold spoons’ or ‘diamond spoons’ are carrying themselves within society. Hyun-woo mentions to me how they have turned their back on the rest of society, only occupied with accumulating more wealth. To Chang-ho, the class division is shown in everyday episodes, where the upper class are exercising their privilege very explicitly. He call this phenomenon ‘Gab-jil’ and explains it as follows:

“‘Gab-jil’ is a compound of ‘Gab’(first stem of the ten celestial stems) and ‘Jil’(slang of ‘doing’). There is an order between consumer and seller, employer and employee, big company and their subcontractor, head office and its franchisee, etc. And if the former afflicts or threaten the later, we call it Gab-jil. Mostly we just mean Gab-jil between people not company when we’re talking about Hell Joseon. (Appendix 6)”

The creation and embrace of the ‘spoon class theory’ also amplifies that the youth today has simply abandoned the belief in hard work and effort alone as realistic means to achieve a comfortable life. This makes a sharp contrast to Chang’s (2006, 351) conclusion that the capitalist market economy in Korea has “created an open society where one can move up the ladder of success through one’s own efforts”. Family background now seems to play a crucial role in one’s opportunity to advance after graduation in contemporary Korea, especially these days where the fear of unemployment is one the biggest factors of life in ‘Hell Joseon’. As we have learned from Dan-oh and Yong-ju’s stories, job-seeking can easily take several years. The more time you can afford to devote to job-preparation, the better a chance for finding a job.

“if you are born in a ‘golden spoon family’, you don't have to worry about how long the preparation of seeking job is, because you get supporting. (...) But if you were born in a dirt spoon family, you have to work and prepare at the same time. That's why you lack behind. If you have 24 hours a day, you sleep 5 hours a night, you still have 19 hours, right? But you have to work 12 hours, and then only have 7 hours left. On the other hand, let's say that if you are golden spoon guy, or from a golden spoon family, you can

sleep for 10 hours and you still have 14 hours left which you can spend on preparing for a job (Appendix 2)."

The fact that youngsters have started dividing each other into 'spoon classes' should not come as a surprise when thinking about the message expressed via 'Hell Joseon' – that today's society has become more and more similar to what characterized the Joseon Dynasty. Hyun-woo puts it like this:

"Because Joseon dynasty has a very bad culture, it is a rank society, right? There is "yangban" high society class, there is "chungmin", it is the lowest level. We still live in a democratic society, but we youngsters think there is class - invisible class. The bad cultures still remain, you know, in Korea now. It's a remain of Joseon dynasty (Appendix 7)."

Even though "the Korean War helped to eradicate the material remnants of traditional class interest" it did "not provide an alternative social structure suitable for the pursuit of modernity (Chang, 2010a, 29)". This is mainly because the new modernization project was highly dependent on external forces and top-down driven - partly by a powerful group of prior elitists from the colonial era, once considered national traitors (*ibid*, 29-30). This has started a wide discussion about the existence of pre-modern structures in today's society, which 'Hell Joseon' is the perfect example of. Hyun-woo's idea of an invisible class is perhaps better understood when taking Chang-ho's observations into consideration:

"Decades ago the young people protested against dictators, the government and wicked capitalists, because they thought they were the root of trouble. Nowadays however, we cannot find out what is the exact cause of this irrationality and against what we should protest (Appendix 6)".

Chang-ho's observation helps us to understand how difficult it can be to grasp the complexity of the new world risks we experience on a global scale. This traditional dominant class - the "yangban" - was partly preserved by the Japanese colonial rule, but the land reform implemented after the liberation (1949-1950) is generally believed to have eradicated village status hierarchies (Hwang & Lim, 2015, 78; Abelman, 2003, 138-139). To arrive at the conclusion that today's 'spoon classes' are actual reproductions of the pre-modern and feudal social hierarchy would therefore be a mistake belonging to a discourse of cultural determinism (Abelman 2003, 144). On the other hand, the symptoms of inequality can be

expressed in different ways, and when asked if there is a difference between the US and Korea, Dan-Oh explains the following to me:

“What I see is that, in the United States, they do not really judge people by one chance. So if you try really hard, and if people think like “that person tried enough” or “we have to give him credit”, they do. But here (in Korea), I think it is more of a.. really like the Joseon era. People perceive other people based on their background. More than Americans do to other people (Appendix 5).”

This idea is important to our understanding of why the youth today is comparing Korea to the Joseon dynasty. Even if the material legacies of the traditional era are gone, we should not rule out that some elements from the Confucian culture, such as paternalism, might have been carried into Korea’s modern society (Hwang & Lim, 2015, 78). To support that argument, Chang (2006, 368) finds that:

“The Confucian value system the Korean’s adopted during the period of the Joseon dynasty period may have become weaker in influence, but it has not been replaced by another value system.”

This observation can seem ironic when recognizing that Confucianism was initially perceived as the underlying reason behind Korea’s “backwardness” and hindrance to development (*ibid*, 365). Korea’s initial experience of modernization during the colonial era and right after the war was therefore highly characterized by a strong attempt of Westernization and hence – a process of ‘de-Confucianization’ (*ibid*). However, as nationalism became a convenient tool for legitimizing authoritarianism, economic growth and industrialization, a nativistic reaction occurred, promoting filial piety and cultural heritage (*ibid*; Chang 2010a, 17; Shin 2006, 14). This does not qualify as a real Confucian revival, but rather as a nationalist agenda to continue the control and instrumentalize the population (*ibid*). This merger between nationalism and traditional virtues is known as the process of ‘retraditionalization’ or ‘yangbanization’, and its legacy might play a crucial role in today’s ‘Hell Joseon’ narrative (Chang, 2010a, 17).

5.5 Chapter 5: Instrumental and Confucian familism

One example of this legacy or revival of traditional values is found in what Chang (2010a, 16) classifies as ‘Confucian familism’ which is an ideology coexisting with the more instrumentalist family-centeredness in Korea – previously defined as the ‘social investment

family'. To give an example of this “marriage” between ‘Confucian familism’ and ‘instrumental familism’, let us take a closer look at what Yong-ju explains to me about actual marriage in Korea today.

“Marriage is not between individuals in Korea. The reason why is, the Korean families are strongly related to each other. (...)western countries, it is something about.. let's say my wife is "Mary" and I am "Mike". Mike and Mary decide to marry, they propose, and then they announce it to their families, right? But in Korea.. before, we need permission from our parents. That is why we introduce the spouse before the proposal. This is because Korea was traditionally based on a large family, it was a large family, because they did a lot of farming. So, when a person comes in, that means they are an asset to that family. (Appendix 2)”

To Yong-Ju, this traditional way of thinking about family is still predominant, especially if you are a ‘gold spoon’. The more heritage at stake, the more involved your family will be in finding you the right partner. Here, the idea of modern ‘spoon classes’ again draw a sharp reference to the pre-modern social hierarchies. Again, the intention is not to simply present critique of ‘Easternness’ or a normative cultural determinism. Therefore, I would highly argue that instead of concluding today’s families are heavily ‘Confucianized’, we should arrive at the observation that the pre-modern family structures and traditions were simply as instrumental as today, driven by capital, rent-seeking and class reproduction. In relation to inequality specifically, the severe lack of a comprehensive welfare model to hold the hand under the ‘dirt spoons’, the rapidly aging society and people with handicaps has always been neglected by conservative forces under the pretext of Confucian values (Chang 2010a, 67). The most infamous example of how ‘gold spoon’ families tend to constrain their children, Yong-ju tells me, is the tragic death of Samsung Chairman Lee Kun-hee’s daughter, Lee Yoon-hyung, who committed suicide in her East Village apartment when denied marrying her boyfriend at the time³. Thus, even though the ‘gold spoon’ children would most likely reject the idea of ‘Hell Joseon’ based on more economic grounds, Yong-ju still thinks they would feel put under pressure based on these collectivistic family values. Ironically, when it comes to relationships and marriage, the ‘dirt spoons’ might have found at least one advantage in

³ To my own understanding, this case has never really been “solved” - and Yong-ju’s story is therefore representing a common perception rather than the “truth”.

‘Hell Joseon’ - the freedom to pursue ‘real love’. However, it seems clear that these norms are not suiting the youth of today.

“And, you know, I found out that many couples break up, because of.. I mean, during the preparation of marriage, because it's about the money. Right? And also, their parents involving in this discussion, this money problem. "Who provide this, and who provide this". It's also Korean culture, and youngsters doesn't like it. It's connected to ‘Hell Joseon’ too (Appendix 7).”

As seen in Hyun-woo recounts, it can be painful to end up with an “unsuitable” partner. The next phenomenon described shows the clear linkage between the education fever, the perceived ‘spoon classes’ and the Confucian/instrumental familism in 21st century Korea:

“in Korea, the most preferred job is doctor, judge, prosecutor or lawyer. There is a company called "Linking couples for marriage" They rank you, based on which school you went to, how much your parents have, based on all these yardsticks. (Appendix 2)”

Yong-ju is not the only one to bring this topic up while I conduct my interviews. Kyung-jin, the self-proclaimed ‘doomed’ master student of sociology at SNU, tells me similar story:

“My friend wanted to get married, and he had no women around him, so he kind of ended up registering himself.. have you ever heard about this company that matches you to get married? So, there are couple of companies that, if you register and pay like 1000\$, they evaluate you to a certain group. Based on your family members, income, occupation, height, look, university degree, where you went, which school you went. (...)So, they classify you in nine grades, and he was ranked 9th grade. Because he's doing sociology. And he told me that he was in the same criteria as farmers in Korea (Appendix 8).”

5.6 Chapter 6: An ongoing ‘gender war’ on the battlefield of ‘Hell Joseon’

Out of this family structure arises yet another issue strongly related to ‘Hell Joseon’ - a phenomenon with such a strong vocabulary attached that I here call classify it as a downright ‘gender war’. It unfolds on the grounds of what have been elucidated so far; rising economic inequality, the ‘spoon class’ neology, the social investment families and most importantly, the legacy of Confucianism in social formations. From my conversations with these young men

and women of Korea, I learned that an excessive stress over potential family formation permeates today's society. Both women and men seem extremely discouraged by what they think the other part is expecting from them. One good example of this is Hyun-woo's anecdote about a friend of his; a clear working for a motorbike company somewhere in Seoul:

“He (Hyun woo’s friend) had a girlfriend, and they tried to get married, but you know, in Korea to get married it costs a lot, because of money. Normally, the man should prepare the house. Housing and care. But the woman just prepare some furniture, refrigerator, or something. Anyway, you know, it cost a lot for men. One room, that's not an option. So maybe two rooms, maybe. At least two rooms. Most women want it. Anyways, he failed in marriage. My friend failed in marriage because of money. (Appendix 7)”

This short anecdote clearly shows some perceived gender roles prevalent in society, and here I must stress the word ‘perceived’. What seems ironic is the fact that the young men I interviewed did not seem to embrace the roles, rather they felt as victims, resulting in deep stress over not being able to accommodate the high demands. On the other hand, the women I met all expressed a strong concern with the way women's role in today's society cannot but drag them down - aiming their critique at not just men as individuals but also institutional gender discrimination found in the education system, labour market and public sphere. To Kyung-jin, these conflicting views and perceptions of how gender roles take form in Korea today forms an important dimension to life in ‘Hell Joseon’.

“I actually wanted to talk more about it because that's how I mostly regard this society as "Hell Joseon", mainly in terms this disparity between men and women right now.(...)I actually, even though I am studying human rights, and I value human rights, I have a very contradicting thing going on in my mind. Since last year, or two years ago, I started despising Korea men. (Appendix 8)”

The disparity between men and women in today's Korea leads us back to the importance of the cultural nurturing of the Korea's Confucian heritage (Chang & Song 2010, 541). But more than this, it is again the interplay between Confucian familism, instrumental familism and the reflexive modernization in the 21st century which should be hold “accountable” for this “gender war”. In second modernity, the different family ideologies have one thing in common; “emphasizing women's functionally dominant but socially subordinate role in family life (*ibid*, 545). The confucian legacy is embedded in the gendered division of labour

in the family, where women are expected to take care of elders, spouses, and children. Instrumentally, they are expected to promote familial interest outside of the house - aggressively (*ibid*). Kyung-jin clearly remembers how her father would talk to her about marriage already in high-school.

“And he actually told me ever since I was in high school not to marry a Korean man. Because he knows me so well, and he was always testing me. So, he gives me a situation: “Kyung-jin, if your husband ask you to fix breakfast in the morning, will you do that?”, and I was like “why the fuck do I have to do that!?”, and he actually sighed when he first asked me (Appendix 8).”

To Kyung-jin, her difficulty with Korean men is beyond just marriage and relationships. According to a recent government report, more than half of all men have paid for sex at some point in their lives (Ock 2017). In addition to this, the murder of a young woman around Gangnam subway st. last year has put misogyny on the agenda in Korea (Park et al. 2016).

“For me, this is “Hell Joseon” because I have no men that I want to meet. And not even as a romantic relationship, even as a person, to think that a man would usually have experience in prostitution and the fact that even though they are in my same school, doing the same thing, to think that they would have certain roles in their mind, that disgust me. Because my worldview is so different from them. (Appendix 8)”

With two radical forces on each side of the “gender spectrum”, the gender debate has become extremely harsh, as mentioned in the beginning of this section. On the far-right wing, a group called *Ilbe* has emerged as a dark shadow on the internet, mainly supported by anonymous contributors and spectators (Sharzer 2016). *Ilbes*’s activities include the online posting of phenomena such as “revenge porn” and “upskirt pictures” from public places (Koo 2014; Steger 2016).

“Being on ilbe is, you basically don't consider women as human, as an equal human being. My friends and I, the fear we started to have from last year is “what if he is ilbe?”, the person who we used to know for a long time, or just started working together with, or any men who we encounter, we started having this implicit fear that “what if he is ilbe?”. That's almost like. i don't know... it became our cautionary act. (Appendix 8)”

In the other corner of the ring, *Megalia*, a new radical feminist movement is giving *Ilbe* worthy resistance, but also polarizing the debate to a great extent. *Megalia* is well known for their rhetorical responses to the misogynist tone geared by the *Ilbe* (Steger 2016).

“a good example is a term called "hannamchong" which basically means all Korean men are like parasites or insects. It is a term that is generally contributed to one online community called "megalia" which is seen as quite radically feminist. (Appendix 3)”

The word ‘*hannamchong*’ was a response to some of the newly degenerating wordings about women, such as “*kimchinyon*” - a “reference to a woman who relies economically on men, but then again would emphasize equal rights, but only when she is in difficult situations. (Appendix 8)”. ‘*kimchinyon*’ is an evolution of the word ‘*doenjangnyeo*’, which is a woman who spend all her money on luxury goods by saving on life essentials such as nutritious food (Steger 2016). And, then there is the word “*sijip*”, which refers to upward mobility through marriage - a phenomenon that was at its highest right after the Korean War but has become very now nowadays (Abelman 2003, 144).

“I have friends, female friends, there is a word called "sijip", it means getting employed in a good family, or getting employed... it actually means getting married with a big guy. (Appendix 2)”

All in all, this rhetoric has gotten its own name as well - “*yohyom*”, an abbreviation of “*yo-son-hyom-oh*” - “hatred towards women”(Appendix 8). The challenge with having these anti-poles as rhetorical trendsetter, Si-won explains to me, as that it ends up backlashing - both ways. *Ilbe* is creating more *Megalia* supporters and opposites, leaving the real discussion in a vacuum. Because, as he says,

“Maybe they (Megalia) did succeed in making some men seeing that there is a problem here. But it certainly did not lead to be changed, I would argue. So, in return there was a huge backlash. (Appendix 3)”

Now, to not make it all black and white, Si-won is a good example of how young men of today are also reflecting on this structural gender discrimination that seems to be the root cause of the hateful rhetoric and actions. I will therefore end this chapter with a last quote from Chang-ho, the young university freshman who chose business over political science to

satisfy his ‘social investment family’. When asked in which specific situation he last used the expression ‘Hell Joseon’, he answers:

“three female college students were in a restaurant and sexually abused by three men next to their table, without any reason. This really happened to some of my girlfriend’s friends. When I hear those stories, all that I can do is cursing “Hell Joseon”. (Appendix 6)”

5.7 Chapter 7: Giving up or escaping ‘Hell Joseon’?

I have now discussed the issues of economic inequality, lack of mobility, education fever, ‘spoon class theory’, family ideologies and a disparity between men and women. The ultimate result of these life experiences in ‘Hell Joseon’ has resulted in a textbook example of Beck’s (2016, 264) concept of apathy, which resembles a “nihilistic strain in postmodernism”. First of all, the term ‘Hell Joseon’ in itself is a highly fatalistic attitude as it implies that Korea is nothing but a new version of the Joseon dynasty, which indeed was very fatalistic (Chang 2006, 351). Along with this fatalism we can identify several responses to life in ‘Hell Joseon’ which are mainly seclusive in their nature. To sum up these reactions, we have yet another neology, adding to our already highly extensive vocabulary of terms related to ‘Hell Joseon’. The young generation of Korea has been dubbed the ‘*sampo*’ generation which is a merger of two Korean words, “three” (*‘sam’*) and “giving-up” (*‘pogi’*). As Yong-ju explains:

“We give up marriage, we give up jobs, we give up children.(...)Why we give up children, why we give up marriage is because we can't find a job. Since we can't find a job, we don't have money. And even if I have a portion of money from a small company, I don't have enough money to buy a house, that is why we give up house. And this is a vicious cycle. If we want to have a child, it is very very expensive, we don't rely on public education. I mentioned about "hagwon", the cram-schools, cost a lot money, so when we make a lot of money, even if make money, you have to spend a large portion of income to child education. (Appendix 2)”

However, as seen in the section about the ongoing “gender war” or from the section about the educational rat race, lack of financial capital is far from the only reason to opt out of marriage or family formation. Remember how Hyun-woo did not wish for his potential children to experience what he did throughout his years in middle school and high school? And Kyung-

jin's experience with men? She has abandoned the idea of finding a Korean husband a long time ago, and so has some of her friends.

“Basically what my friends, including me and the women in the online community think is that we are doomed. We are destined to live by ourselves, because Korean men are shitty (appendix 8).”

In fact, it turns out that notion of a generation ‘giving up’ three things is horribly outdated. Since this term came into existence maybe ten years ago, it has expanded to not five, not seven, but nine ‘giving-ups’ now. From ‘sam-po’ to ‘o-po’ to ‘chil-po’ and now ‘gu-po’. Dan-oh helps me with understanding these new things the Korean youth are ‘giving up’:

“three is "dating, marriage and giving birth", "o-po" is "meeting people and buying house", and seven-po is "getting a job and hope", and 9-po is "Health and education". (Appendix 5)”

In extreme situations, this ‘giving-up’ generation transcends into ‘dal-gwan’ generation which is not just giving up things, but simply accepting life as it is. To, Dan-oh this is a matter of realizing that not just the upper-class but also the middle-class status is out of range.

“"dalg-wan" means uhm.. it's more.. it's beyond giving up ... beyond giving up. You are just accepting this Hell Joseon reality and just living on a minimum wage.. (Appendix 5)”

Now, to link this ‘postmodern nihilistic apathy’ with Korea’s experience of a double compressed modernity, the reaction of giving up and beyond resembles what Beck (2016) and Chang & Song (2010) identifies as ‘*risk-averse individualization*’. In the calculated realization that families in Korea have become severely overheated based on a long list of issues discussed throughout the analysis, the youth is simply withdrawing itself from these new risks imposed by 1) A highly dependent, top down and economic-growth oriented modernization and 2) a turbulent structural change imposed by drivers of second modernity. In the case Korean women, the double compressed modernity has been especially harsh, because of the “gender-based structure of family relations and duties that has in part been recycled from the Confucian past and in part manufactured under industrial capitalism (Chang & Song 2010, 540-541)”. For this reason, Cho (2015, 458) concludes that

“Youth in South Korea are beginning to realize that they have only two choices to make in the present neoliberal condition: they can study and labor until they burn out as “willing slaves,” or they can (un)willingly flee the world of overwork and excessive self-exploitation (Cho 2015, 458).”

It should come as no surprise by now that the concept of ‘fleeing’ Korea has also gotten its own expression now ‘*Tal Joseon*’ - ‘escape Joseon’. This concept is a recurring theme in my interviews, and several of my informants have themselves been temporarily abroad and away from Korea. Out of the stories, I think Hyun-woo’s recollection of a friend’s attempt to ‘escape’ to New Zealand is the strongest, showing the multiple risks related to life in Korea.

“One of my friends, he is a fitness trainer, he tried to get a job in Korea. But there is no opportunity in Korea, so he prepared to go to new zealand(...)Because he thinks it is very difficult to live in Korea(...)You know Korea, high competition in the school. It's also Hell Joseon. Every parents, they push their children to study very hard, most parents think studying is the only way to be successful. So, sometimes, many students, some students, they suicide themselves, because of high competition. (Appendix 7)”

In Cho’s (2015) paper named the “spec (specifications) generation who can’t say no”, she talks about the birth of the neoliberal subject, which I to a long extent tend to agree with. She argues the spec generation and neoliberal subjects are risk-averse, as we have seen, and can be characterized as “hyperrational fools” who cannot set aside their tendency to make everything up by cost-benefit analysis (Cho 2015, 457). Although this might seem fitting from what we have seen so far, I beg to differ, in light of Cho’s final verdict of the youth:

“The members of the spec generation who have been busy capitalizing themselves with their parents’ investment and support are not ready to say “no” to neoliberalism. The language of inalienable rights and social justice is no longer relevant to students whose minds and bodies have already been heavily invested in the neoliberal project of human capital development (...) The spec generation will not engage in organized social movements that are wedded to the issues of human rights and social justice (Cho 2015, 458)”.

In the following two chapters, I challenge this very certain verdict of the Korean youth’s to say “no”, to contemplate on social justice issues and to engage in social activism.

5.8 Chapter 8: From diamond spoons to prison spoons

First, from my interview with Si-Won, I learn that the word “effort” (*Nolyeog*) is now seen as a standing joke amongst the youth. “Oh, so as long as we make an *effort* and work *hard*..” - said with a clear ironic distance. This attitude comes partly from the fact that former President Park Geun-hye apparently had a certain predilection for the word, which in hindsight cannot but seem ironic. However, together with the stark consciousness of powerlessness arises a strong by-product - ‘principles of meritarian justice’ (Abelmann 2003, 144).

Park Geun-hye and her partners in crime Choi Soon-sil and Lee Jae-yong are all important figures in the ‘spoon class theory’ and the universe of ‘Hell Joseon’. But while Park, Choi and Lee are accused of being implicit in either corruption, power abuse or censorship, what ignited the recent political scandal was actually something else. Before the actual political scandal broke out, female students of Ewha Womans University in Seoul had already set up sit-in protests and demonstrations at campus based on the university's plan to expand an education program which did not require any former credentials (specs) except from cool cash (Choe, 2017; Kim, 2016b; Ock, 2016b). In the middle of all this, rumours that Choi Soon-sil’s daughter Chung Yoo-ra, a gold winning equestrian athlete had received preferential treatment because of her ‘diamond spoon’ status started flourishing (*ibid*; Ock, 2016). The rest is history. Even though justice may have been served in this case, what the Koreans are asking themselves now is, “how much ‘effort’ did Chung Yoo-ra exactly put into her life to get where she is (or used to be), and how much ‘effort’ did Park herself have to make to continue her father’s legacy as a crony president?” For better or worse, Si-won explains,

“the whole discrediting of the government and the political institution has served as a confirmation of everything that has been said under the umbrella of ‘Hell Joseon’. To say I feel vindicated would imply certain glee, so I wouldn't say that. But it is tragic. Tragic in a way that people who were using the term ‘Hell Joseon’ were right in many ways about it (Appendix 3).”

From the theoretical aspect of a double-compressed modernity, several things should be mentioned in relation to this recent episode of activism. The scandal ended with the first successful impeachment of a president in Korea’s history, and on May 9, 2017, the progressive candidate and former human rights lawyer Moon Jae-in won the presidential election (Borowiec, 2017; McCurry, 2017).

This is a clear transformation brought along by a growing frustration and anger with society, which in turn stems from the realization of the inconsistencies or imbalances coming from Korea's rapid modernization. In many ways, these events are thus intrinsically connected to "reflexive modernization" and the consequences from Korea's experience with first and second modernity. In second modernity, Beck sees three types of responses to the obstacles prevailing in the (world) risk society - 1) denial, 2) apathy 3) or transformation (Beck 2016, 264). As the 'giving up' generation may be an expression of apathy, this political participation and call for social justice is a clear example of the third response - transformation, although it is still on the verge. Perhaps the actions also imply that the transformation from first to second modernity is still ongoing in Korea, in the sense that the institutional configurations which reflexive modernizations brings along have just begun (Han & Shim 2010, 467). No matter what, the bringing down of Park Geun-hye, and especially the youth's involvement in this process should be praised as "a self-critical aspect of second modernity which entails the ability to question the very assumptions of the catching-up modernization pursued so far (*ibid*)".

The next and final chapter of this thesis, I continue the discussion about reflexive modernization and the youth's ability to look forward.

5.9 Chapter 9: 'Hell Joseon' - paving the way for an alternative development?

As stated in the epistemological considerations, 'Hell Joseon' is a contested expression and should not be regarded as the ultimate objective truth of Korea as a whole.

"But interestingly, exactly about that part, I noted that president Park Geun-Hye despises that term, "Hell Joseon", because her viewpoint about this country is so positive and yet "Hell Joseon" always destructs that image of Korea, so.. (appendix 8)"

As I argue, 'Hell Joseon' is just one out of many narratives defining the country, and the interesting aspect is thus not to look at how much or little Korea is a 'Hell', but *why* this specific group of people - the youth of Korea has come to this conclusion. From my field work in Seoul I quickly come to learn that 1) 'Hell Joseon' is neither used nor nurtured by the "older" generation and 2) it is a highly sensitive expression, almost comparable to the infamous N-word related to America's history of racial segregation as Chan-ho explains to me. It is on these ground Kyung-jin tells me that 'Hell Joseon' to her also comes from the discrepancy between old and young in Korea, a disparity more outspoken in Korea than in most other countries, she thinks.

“I mean, for example, my father who is 76, he will not use the term Hell Joseon in any context. There are other ways to say the world is fucked up. Hell Joseon really is a very particular expression, with a particular meaning in Korea, which is why you need to be careful in how you bring it up with Koreans. But overall, the ones who use it.. I mean, these are the ones who are really questioning.. like just what exactly did South Korea aspire to become? (appendix 3)”

What Si-won indicates here is worth noticing. According to him, the users of ‘Hell Joseon’ are questioning the Korea’s development goals; “what did Korea aspire to become”? From the review of Korea’s modernity, we learned that the post-war development was highly securitized and driven by the wish for independence and national regeneration (Moon 2005; Shin 2006; Moon & Bun 2011). Judging Korea’s development on these premises, it seems hard to deny a certain notion of success. The construction of this specific modernity in Korea was a nationalist project and highly militarized as well - counting on a total instrumentalization and mobilization of citizens of the nation (*ibid*). This is why, as Kyung-jin explains, her dad has been responding to these new “realities” or risks perceived by the youth by similar an initial stage of ‘denial’ (Beck 2016, 260).

“My dad used to be really conservative, but when the impeachment happened he actually got drastically changed in his political view. Because he worshiped, my parents both worshiped Park Chung-hee. Actually, my dad had certain phase in denial, he actually didn't watch the news, which he always watches every day. (appendix 8)”

Hyun-woo widely agrees with Kyung-jin and Si-won in experiences of the discrepancy between old and young. According to him, the ‘old’ generation devoted its life to national development. However, since it was so rapid, their behaviour has not changed enough while young people have more access to internet and SNS, learning about new cultures, ideologies and trends. Thus, when the ‘young’ want to change behaviour, the ‘old’ block it with their higher positions.

What Hyun-woo points to here is a sign of reflexive modernization indicated by the opportunities with globalization and technology in second modernity to start comparing development projects to other countries’ experiences (Beck 2016, 261). Let us see how Hyun-woo continues his argument.

“So, youngsters don’t want to follow it, but still there is big gap. Now, we can eat (laughing), but at that time - long time ago - there was no food to eat. Now we can eat, and we have enough food, and then youngsters they think more. More developed ideas and thoughts, like... now they want their own time, free time, after work, even if they don't get paid well (appendix 7)”

The general observation among my informants is that the large discrepancy between themselves and their parents’ generation arrives from very fact of Korea’s ‘overspeeded’ road to modernity (Chang 2010b, 15). But if things have changed this much, then what do the youth want instead. What should be done differently? To Hyun-woo, who has been working in a *chaebol* company now for more than six years, the problem lies in the ‘inefficient’ and strictly hierarchical working culture which is being uphold now by CEO’s who all grew up within this militarized and rush-to developmentalist era (Lie 2006, 140-150; Moon 2005, 174-175). In fact, Hyun-woo is now thinking about quitting the “perfect” job which most of his childhood was spent making possible to get. Nevertheless, the fact that he is willing to take the next step says something about how severe the situation is, and that the youth might not be that afraid to say “no”.

“If I am a boss (in chaebol), it means I survived in this bad culture. And maybe at that time, in the future, I am afraid I will be the same person as the boss, right? I am afraid of it. So, that's why I want to start my own business you know. Before corrupting my inner soul (appendix 7)”

Something points to the fact that Korea’s deficit of liberalism in terms of the individual freedom and self-realization cannot remain status-quo anymore. The national risks defining the first modernity is no longer prevalent, and new global risks have arisen calling for a new approach. This requires transformation as response, as Beck discusses (2016, 264).

It could be a sign that our generation want something different than our parents. I feel like there is a shift in our demands for a good life. We think more about our happiness right here and now, compared to our parents’ generation that was thinking about making the future better. It’s almost like the expression “yolo”. We want to live our lives now, spend more time free and do what we want. That would be better for our society (Appendix 4).

We have now been through the whole range of intrinsically connected expressions, mechanisms, opinions, tendencies and theories connected to life in ‘Hell Joseon’. To wrap up the analytical section of the thesis, and before moving on to a final conclusion, I wish to give the final word to Jung-hee whom I met in Copenhagen after my field work was over. He did not confirm to the expression ‘Hell Joseon’ itself, as it implies a certain legitimization of the Japanese colonial era.

“By discrediting Joseon Dynasty, we are denying our own history and values and adhering to a Japanese narrative of how “Backwards” Joseon was, as a reasoning for the legitimacy of colonization and modernization. (Appendix 9)”

He tells me that most Koreans are misunderstanding the philosophy of Confucianism which is not necessarily oppression women or others in society, as it would seem. In fact, gender equality might have been ‘better’ during the Joseon era than now he thinks. With that said, he fully recognizes the risks implied in the narrative of ‘Hell Joseon’. Perhaps ‘Hell Korea’ would have been a more fitting term, since the problems of today are fundamentally different.

“The reason why I don’t think Hell Joseon is a good expression, is because society has lately changed. We have had economic development, and now we live in a golden age. But we have not changed behaviour, and that is the real problem. We all strive for(□□) the same education, the same jobs, which creates competition. We don’t need those things anymore. The entrance exam, the “suneung” is a good example. We need to change it, because it prevents people from learning and thinking properly. (Appendix 9)”

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis takes its outset in the newly coined expression ‘Hell Joseon’ used by the youth in South Korea. ‘Hell Joseon’ is a comparison between today’s society and the pre-modern Joseon Dynasty. It thus implies that Korea today is a “living hell” resembling a feudal and Confucian social structure. The aim with this thesis was therefore to elucidate the many meanings, feelings and opinions contained in the expression, by posing the research question: What are the main characteristics of life in ‘Hell Joseon’? To arrive at a comprehensive answer, I carried out an empirical field work in Seoul, the capital city, and interviewed a handful young Koreans who all had a story to tell. Throughout my analysis, I find that life in ‘Hell Joseon’ is strongly characterized by a society full of discrepancies - between rich and

poor, between old and young, between man and woman, between rural and urban, between local and global, between East and West - and between past and the present. High youth unemployment, rising inequality and a sharp class division has been accelerated by the shift to a neoliberal economy without sufficient welfare institutions to accommodate this transformation. The 'social investment families' has thus been highly overburdened, resulting in a rising and highly cost-heavy educational competition, which in turn has made the gap between rich and poor even bigger. Now, Koreans divide themselves in 'spoon classes' and within the framework of 'Hell Joseon', they express a resemblance between this new class division and the old feudal social structure. Yet, values and cultural elements of the Joseon appears to remain in throughout the Korean society today, illustrated by a Confucian familism specifically. This has spawned a "gender war" between far-right and feminist movements and a general polarization between young women and men in Korea. All in all, these tendencies are widely a product of Korea's complex experience of modernization, characterized by a double-compression which has left society in highly confusing state. Traditional and (post)modern elements are coexisting in Korea's modernity, but the transition to second modernity driven by neoliberalization and globalization are distorting the relationship between these. Moreover, 'Hell Joseon' contains fragments of Beck's three stages in reaction to the world risk society or second modernity. 1) Denial is met by the old generation, strongly supporting a nationalist perspective and the myth of mobility. 2) Apathy is a strongly suggested by the term 'Hell Joseon' itself, but is even more explicit in the "giving up culture" of marriage, children, job, housing, hope, health and education. 3) Transformation can slowly be detected in the candlelight revolution and Women's strong opposing of the hegemonic gender roles prevalent in Korea. Lastly, 'Hell Joseon' rejects the conventional paradigm of development through nationalism and economic growth, in favour of are more liberal modernization giving space for life-work balance and self-realization.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide

The way I introduce about myself and the purpose of the interview with brief explanation about the thesis.

- A student at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, enrolled at the Master Program in Asian Studies.
- Or, put more simple, a Danish Master student from Lund University.
- Writing thesis about 'Hell-joseon'

Guideline

- Their role in the study.
- The conditions for participation.
- Ways in which the data will be gathered (to tape interviews or take photos thus also requires that you ask for permission and consent).
- That participation is voluntary.
- That participation can be terminated by the respondent at any time and 6 with no consequences.
- That the participants will be guaranteed anonymity.
- That the collected data will be treated confidentially and stored safely.
- That the collected data will only be used for the Master's thesis.
- That the Master's thesis will be published at a public website managed by Lund University Library.

- Always guarantee your respondents anonymity. If you want to quote scholars or officials, always ask for permission.

Introductory questions:

- So I've heard about this expression Hell Joseon – what's that all about? Korea seems as a nice place.

Main Questions:

- What does “Hell Joseon” mean to you?
- Can you give an example of what it feels like to live in “Hell Joseon”?
- When was the first time you heard of or started using this expression?
- In which situation do you experience the expression being used?
- What do you think have caused the rise of “Hell Joseon”?
- What is your response to living in “Hell Joseon”?
- Does the expression has any direct meaning to how you live your life?
- What makes Korea specials?
- What would you like from moving abroad?
- What's your concerns about the future?
- Employment? Irregular? Irregular? Contract status? Wages? Running business?
- Housing? – parents or on your own?
- Education?
- Who's responsible?
- What about Gender?

Strategies:

- Telling to my interviewees I have background knowledge about Korea so they feel more comfortable for the conversation, for example, explaining their situation with some Korean words
- Talk to as many as possible
- Divide them into groups later

8.2 Appendix 2: Interview with Yong-ju

Date: 17th January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: YongJu. Initials: YJ

JS: So, what are your first impressions when I say "Hell Joseon"?

YJ: I.. if you have this full political spectrum, I am kind of on the conservative side, so I do not fully agree with this idea of hell Joseon. Our country has recently been modernized, about fifty years approximately. Have you heard about the Korean history before?

JS: I am pretty familiar with the..

YJ: You are? Okay

JS: .. the pre-IMF and post-IMF situation, 1970s and democratization

YJ: yes exactly, yes. And uhm. What I think is partially applying to society, the reason why this happen, according to some major media, they say that recently there was a big agreement, a political agreement, that tried to expand the day of working. Have you heard about the uhm.. uhm.

JS: you can say it in Korean

YJ: uhm.. they have tried to expand the age for retirement, and when they tried this, there were two agendas: The first one was expanding the age for retirement. The second was to have employed "imguppigere" (translate to korean), "imguppigere" is the most wage, the highest wage they receive is not based on age, but on..

JS: Merit?

YJ: yes there is a peak and then it goes back down, but this agenda was not passed within the congress.

JS: who tried to implement this? was it the ruling governing party, the Ssanuri-dang, or was it both..

YJ: Both.. both

JS: oh okay, so it was like a majority of the..

YJ: yes exactly. But they only employed the first agenda, and the second agenda was actually *forgotten*.

JS: I see, and when was this exactly?

YJ: couple of years ago. two.. two-three years ago

JS: Ok, so it was during Park Geun-hye?

YJ: exactly. What happened was next, the media started to forget about this agenda. And they agreed to employ old people until they are 60, but the problem is that the wages keep going up! So on the company's perspective, they cannot employ new employees, which is why all the effect comes directly to people around our age - the young generation.

JS: alright, that kind of makes sense. When you implement one agenda but forget the other one, which would made it possible for them (the companies) to also decrease the salaries

YJ: exactly. This is main reason why the word hell joseon, the word Hell Joseon has come out recently.

JS: okay

YJ: Because, you know, you heard about after the 1997 - there was a research on.. for the last two decades of Korean Economy, from 1997 to 2006, the economy, the growth of the economy started to decrease.

JS: yea.

YJ: However, the economic growth from 2006 till 2016 is flat. so, when we see this whole picture, seems like the last two decades it has been dropping, but when we look into it closely, the first decade and the second decade, they show a totally different story. So, people now when they say Hell Joseon, and uhm, they are so pessimistic about the situation, it is just on the media, is actually keep on broadcasting all these negatives sides of Korea.

JS: Yes.

YJ: But when look into it in details, there's another story.

JS: Yes, okay. Because that is also how I got to know about the concept of Hell Joseon. It's obviously because even the English-spoken media has also taken this concept, and every time they report something negative, like staggering unemployment rates, or suicide rates or anything which is connected to the Korean society, they put it in the title, or in the header. Like "Hell Joseon" something something something.. that is why I also have stumbled upon it. But in your opinion, it popped up two or three years ago, the expression?

YJ: Yes, yes exactly. No more than three years ago. As far as I know.

JS: Ok.

YJ: That's the main reason why it came out, you know, all the media and the broadcasting centres, they want to make a catchy phrase when they are writing an article or showing.. broadcasting any kind of news. So, this comes of first. And people around our age - the young generation - I am thirty years old in Korean age

JS: Yes, you are still..

YJ: I am still, I am the young generation..

JS: .. and you are a student?

YJ: yes exactly.. so, you know. young people tend to be very progressive, and when they catch these phrases, they are ready to actually come out and go out and protest or something.

JS: sure, sure. So you think this concept was something implemented from the top and then to the bottom? So someone in the media, somewhere in the landscape, came upon this expression and then the youth generation started to take it?

YJ: Yes, yes exactly. Uhm, because if you look into the Korean newspaper - you know there is a whole spectrum - and majority of the newspapers, including conservative newspapers, they are actually uhm.. they are actually taking this.. they are actually agreeing to this term "Hell Joseon".

JS: okay so you also have the *right* (right-winged) part of the spectrum using this term?

YJ: to a certain degree, yes.

JS: alright!

YJ: if you see, there are five major newspapers in Korea. It's chochundo, hankyun-makyoung

JS: Yea i know the Chosun ilbo

YJ: yea and the chosun ilbo.

JS: ok, and dong-a ilbo?

YJ: yes exactly, and chunang ilbo, these are the major three.

JS: and would you put the hankyore.. ?

YJ: NO, it is a very minor.

JS: ah okay okay

YJ: and the rest two are - Hankook Gyeongje, korean economy, and Maeil Gyeongje, daily economy.

JS: Ok.

YJ: These are the five major newspapers, but four - excluding hankook gyeongje - they are actually using this phrase. On the other side, there is hankyore and kyunghyang, they are very progressive. Hankyore is the most progressive, and kyunghyang is quite left-side.

JS: yes.

YJ: even the right side of newspapers are actually employing this vocabulary.

JS: yes and that is interesting

YJ: it is actually very interesting yes.

JS: but I guess, putting it into relation to this whole choi soon-sil gate, would you say that those five major newspapers have also taken the same position towards the scandal, or are someone still endorsing Park? directly in the newspapers.

YJ: Uhm there is one. They are not actually endorsing, president park, but they are re-boding towards this idea of Park-geun hye, who is actually impeached, is it the hankook gyeongje, the most right-sided

JS: Alright

YJ: a right-wing newspaper. they say that.. how they re-bud is, you know, before we had a lot of presidents including Lee myung bak, No moo hyun, Kim dae jung, all these presidents did a similar thing, but they are not.. uhm this is actually not a not event, it is expanded. and they are asking why are you using a different yardstick on criticizing the president (Park geun hye). Have you heard about the *Yeonpyeongdo Haejeon*, the *yeonpyon sea war*? There was a battle on the west sea?

JS: When did this happen?

YJ: it was Kim daejung

JS: Yea okay. then I know it, it was during his sunshine policy, and it sort of distracted his whole idea of collaborating with the north. Yes? Okay.

YJ: What happened was when there was the battle on the west sea, you know what he was doing?

JS: no?

YJ: He was in Japan watching soccer game.

JS: ooh yea

YJ: This is not really broadcasted or widened, so we just forget about what happened in the past. **JS:** oh yea I see. So it is kind of similar to the sewol ferry accident..

YJ: Yes similar

JS: and the seven hours of unregistered events?

YJ: yes exactly. So why they are asking.. it's okay. but why are aren't they applying the same yardstick when they are criticizing the president?

JS: yes.

YJ: and recent there is a, a live debate between congressmen and also a.. I am not sure how to say this.. a *jukkpil* (in korean) the highest writer of a newspaper?

JS: hm yes like the editor-in-chief? I would say

YJ: I guess. the main writer. Who acts and decide which direction the newspaper should..

JS: that would be the editor-in-chief as far as I know, but I am not totally sure about the translation into english.

YJ: yes maybe it was about last weekend, two weeks ago or maybe a week ago, they came out and talked about the same issue. And you know, what is on the newspapers are really shallow. And they are only digging the stuff up about what President Park is doing wrong. And to a certain degree is it right but there is a lot of scandals and.. misinformation has been broadcasted and detained in news articles. And he started talking about this issue, exactly like is really similar like this. Why are you guys not applying the same yardstick? And to a certain degree... yea yea yea, that is right.

JS: uhm. I just want to clear up. Are those four-five major newspapers, are they owned by the same conglomerates or are they independent.. if you have any knowledge about that? It just came up to my mind, because media concentration could be a issue.

YJ: yes exactly exactly.. you know, commercial trade. Samsung are actually giving a lot of money for commercials as why they are really lean towards samsung which is a major company. So, one incident that happened. There was an oil spill, about a decade ago. And all the newspapers has not talked about which company that made the mistake. Only one. Hankyore!

JS: alright. The one that is not funded by..

YJ: yes, less or not at all. Most left wing newspaper only dealt with this issue. It was samsung engineering or something, I am not sure, but it was related to samsung. They only revealed that it was samsung, and on the company they only said it was an accident. and how they broadcasted it was. Samsung came in, and they tried to fix it and tried to collect all the oils,

JS: Ok.. trying to frame them as the hero part or something.. oh that's interesting!

YJ: Yes exactly.

JS: but then again. you have these newspapers who are basically agreeing on using a term which is very critical in my opinion. because.. yea.. so, going back to the expression itself. What does it really mean to you?

YJ: Hell Joseon?

JS: yea, like, for you. like, how do you feel or what do you sense about it?

YJ: To a certain degree, I do agree.

JS: to a certain degree.

YJ: Because, you know, uhm, I have a lot of friends.. I had a similar interview with few of my friends, some alumnis who graduated, and what they talked about was. It is really hard to get a job except for those who majored in business or economy, economics, it's pretty prone for them to get a job, but it takes about a year, approximately a year, roughly. but those who majored in language, media, or whatever, politics.

JS: so humanities,

YJ: humanities,

JS: political science

YJ: exactly, it is really hard for them to find a job

JS: ok

YJ: so my roommate, he said he was looking for, searching for a job in a year and a half. He was really depressed, extremely depressed. and uhm, he decided to go into graduate school, so now he just moved on. He major in India.

JS: okay, so is that sort of his escape, or?

YJ: hm..

JS: if you can say..

YJ: maybe half-half.. truly speaking yes.

JS: Ok. but you yourself would never use the expression? like if you encountered any..

YJ: officially I will not. officially i will not, but you know, when we have.. among.. between my friends with a light conversation I would just mention it, maybe once or twice.. after all, it's pretty hard to get a job.

JS: Ok. so it's becoming into.. so it is also maybe losing its value? would you say that.

YJ: No no no, it is still valid! still valid among the majority of the Koreans, especially the young generation. But uhm, yes that is how it is actually taken. Formally. As I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, I am perceiving this from a conservative perspective.

JS: yes, I remember.

YJ: so this interview might be a little lean to the right-wing side, yes.

JS: But that is exactly what I wanted, actually, to not just find people who totally agree with the concept. I think I can find enough people who tell me all the bad things about what is going on. So I would really appreciate hearing something which is also disagreeing or saying that let's try to look at the other side of the medal. So, is there anything discrediting people just blaming their situation by using the expression of Hell Joseon, saying.. like, what could they be doing wrong? what could they do better or what could they change in order to not encounter the constant Hell Joseon?

YJ: uhm. One thing is that our country, we don't have any natural resources, that is why it is very competitive.

JS: yea.

YJ: and I know other countries are also competitive but what is pretty sure is that this competition starts really early in Korea. Some start already in elementary/middle school, but in high school it actually, it is the outmost competition you can experience is during high school. And nowadays I see that. about a decade ago I entered college, in 2007.

JS: Yea.

YJ: But what I see recently is that in the libraries, that it is pretty packed. It is really packed. I can see people like freshmen and sophomore they don't really study. It is a custom for me that guys, when they enter college, the first year they just spent time, they just squander their time, drinking partying whatever that can be,

JS: ok, I think that is a widespread notion. I remember it from Denmark as well.

YJ: oh, okay really

JS: yes son in that sense we are kinda

YJ: .. similar..

JS: Yes, in high school.

YJ: In high school?

JS: yes, so when you turn 16-17 is it that age-span? How old are you when you enter high school in Korea?

YJ: 16

JS: yea okay, well yes.

YJ: but when they enter college, they start to spent all this time drinking and playing right, enjoying their life.

JS: oh, when they enter college. so that is after high school.

YJ: yes, in high school that is the very competitive part.

JS: alright, and then you finalize it with that 4 hour exam thing, what is it called?

YJ: *su-neung*, yes, 6 hours.

JS: okay.

YJ: and when they enter college, normally the guys, the males. they have to join the military for approximately 2 years. I heard that it is about 22 months nowadays, so approximately 2 years roughly, but when they join the military, that's the turning point of their life. When they come back to school after being discharged from their military service,

JS: yes.

YJ: they start to actually focus on studying, because they are actually. .they are growing up, start growing up after that. after 2 years of military service. But now what I hear and see from people and people around me, is that they start to spend a lot of time in library, because it is already extention of their high school life, because they know that it is really hard to get a job

JS: yes

YJ: and recently there was an article in the newspapers saying that you know you go to SNU - seoul national university.

JS: Yea, I am only their for two weeks tho. Attending a 2weeks course in human rights, like a crash course. So I am not really that costum to their..

YJ: oh ok ok.. hm, it is really hierarchicalized, there is a very spec hierarchy in Korea on which undergrad you went.

JS: okay so that the master's programmes..

YJ: .. doesn't count that much. Everything you are judged by is by which undergraduate school you went to. because they think that.. we call it "hakbul-setak", means washing your degree. Making a brand new one with your school.

JS: So, just for the record. The best universities you can go to in Korea is?

YJ: Seoul national university, SKY.

JS: yes, Sky.

YJ: Kaist

JS: and kaist as well?

YJ: this is an excellent school as well

JS: but is it technical or what?

YJ: exactly

JS: okay, I have never really understood where in the hall map of universities, Kaist is fitting in. But it is an engineering..

YJ: .. based school yes. Science school. that is based on.. main campus is in Daejeon, about two hours from here in Seoul, and there is another campus near Kookje University. And do you want to know the rank??

JS: uhm, hm.. how many universities do you actually have here in Seoul?

YJ: oh, I don't know. But normally when they say good school is like 5-10. SKY, and then Sungkyunkwan, Hanyang, Sogang, have you heard about some of them?

JS: Yes I remember them from you know, subway maps and you know..

YJ: And Hankyong University of Foreign Studies.

JS: ah, my girlfriend studied there, she took an undergraduate programme in Chinese Area Studies

YJ: uhhh, how, which year?

JS: she is born in 90, so she graduated 2 or 3 years ago

YJ: so maybe we studied at the same time

JS: yes but now she moved to Denmark to pursue her master's degree there, so we are both based in Denmark at the moment.

YJ: is she Korean?

JS: Yes, yes she is.

YJ: well, Hankyong University of Foreign Studies is very very small, so we might have bumped into each other.

JS: is it a second or third tier university?

YJ: hm, it is a third tier university yes.

JS: it is incredible this way of categorizing universities. Just to put it in a perspective, right. In Denmark, we have 5 universities in the whole country, right.

YJ: oh..

JS: maximum 25-28% of the whole generation (year) will actually get accepted to a university

YJ: 28%?

JS: yes, maximum 30% ! and these days we are talking about too many people are getting accepted to a university. and that's only 30%. I reckon in Korea it's between 70-80%..

YJ: more than that..

JS: yes that is what I have heard, but I am not really sure. And there is no real ranking. If you get accepted to a university, you are at a university. whichever it is, doesn't really matter. What matters is your master program, or your bachelor program. Are you doing political science, are you doing law? are you doing medicine, I don't know. Those three are the most popular ones. But if you do it in one town, or at one university or another, it doesn't really matter. It is mostly the degree that keeps you, like in a hierarchy. just to put it into a perspective.

4 minutes of talking about how YJ has been in Copenhagen once and liked the architecture. Comparing of Seoul and Copenhagen building-wise.

JS: ok, so we sort of digressed. Uhm, where did we come from?

YJ: about Hell Joseon.. about..

JS: oh yes, you were sort of explaining about this competitive and how you saw a tendency of young guys in college spending more time in libraries and sort of devoting themselves more to their studies than they used to do.

YJ: Yes exactly. but they are not studying what their are learning from school. When there is a.. each company has their own test called.. the yardstick of the best company that you can actually join in Korea is Samsung, Hyundai, or AmorePacific

JS: Are those the chaebol?

YJ: Yes, chaebol. and uhm, SK..

JS: telecom? a telecommunication

YJ: Yes telecom is under the SK group.

JS: ok

YJ: and all of these companies have their own test. And samsung is the yardstick. So, when they want to take.. they have to take a test before interviews. Right? But they have their own test called SAAT, I am not sure.

JS: okay, so like an entrance exam just to be considered as a new employee?

YJ: that is right, and that is what they are studying for. it is not what they are learning from school. but the test that the company is asking. that is what they are studying. In korea they uhm, TOEIC. have you heard about this english test?

JS: yes, you are usually quite "good" at it in my view, like getting high scores.

YJ. haha yes technically.

JS: yes, in theory.

YJ. so, i think we should talk about that.

JS. hold on. just to continue down the road with entry exams to samsung and everything. How do you even get considered to being able to take this test?

YJ: oh, you can just.. after graduating, or when you are looking ahead to graduate, those terms are when you can apply. I think I heard there are two terms (maybe three) when you can apply, in winter/summer or fall/spring. I haven't applied myself.

JS: so it is basically like continuing your education?

YJ: yes right.

JS: and do they take into consideration your grades and your like, from university?

YJ: uhm they consider it, but..

JS: but the test is..

YJ: what matters

JS: Okay.. well that is something new to me.

YJ: And well this is quite under the record, heard it from a CEO from Samsung, that when they look for the candidate, they wanna employ, they avoid people who did demonstration. there is some clubs in college that is a symbol of being progressive. Have you heard about *pungmul*? *pungak*? You know these traditional korean drum, instrustruments.

JS: yes, I remember quite well

YJ: but the whole idea of this is that underline these clubs, they are very progressive, anti-government.

JS: okay!

So when they come to a company. Samsung do not have a labour union. they do not have a labour union. they try to avoid these people.

JS: yes.

YJ: you know, they want to be as productive as possible, so they try to avoid these guys. So that is what I heard from a CEO, they try to avoid them. And what else do you look for? when they pass all these test, as I recall it. For the final interview, they will ask a lot of tough question to see how this guy is

JS: ok

YJ: and that is all they look for

JS: how do they know whether you have been part of a progressive club during the..

YJ: uhm, they can actually infer when they look into the resumés, so as long as they don't right down what kind of activities they were in, it is gonna be okay

JS: so you could avoid putting it in your CV and

YJ: exactly, exactly

JS: ok, ok.. well..

YJ: But before this, the high school education system, when they go up to the second year, it's going to be the 11th grade - there is 3 years in high school, and 3 years in middle, and 6 years in elementary school. Uhm, when they go up after the first year of high school, they are going to decide which major they are going to study. One is based on science, math - and one is based on social science and yes. So I chose the latter one (the social science)

JS: is there a way to turning back?

YJ: it is almost.. they can, but almost nobody would do, few people do it.

JS: ok yes

YJ: uhm, so since math and science is tough, people try to avoid this section. They move on to the social science, language, literature, so when they apply for university - their path is actually, unseen, but it is already agreed -

JS: laid out?

YJ: it is already agreed yes, so who studies science, when they go to college they apply for engineering, math or anything.. those who study really well go to medicine, to become doctor. On the other side, the best ones go to law school, but we do not have law department in undergraduate schools any more. I am emphasizing "anymore". We used to have it, 5-10 years ago, but they decided because there was an bar-exam, an extra bar exam, that if you wanted to become a layer or any kind of job in the legal section, they had to take a test called "sabubgosi", but they tried to eradicate the system but uhm.. the people who had already taken this test and you know, people who's out already, they people in the system.

JS: ah yes okay, they do not want to let new people in?

YJ: Yes partly, you know, recently they uhm.. there are few major schools which has law schools, so undergrad law department has disappeared.

JS: so what do you do in practice if you want to study law?

YJ: you can't, actually. Practically you can't. You have to go to graduate school.

JS: ok?

YJ: you have to take some courses in school, so that's..

JS: so could you have a minor in law during undergraduate and then moving up to a graduate you could get your major in Law?

YJ: exactly yes.

JS: oh okay

YJ: School which have law schools independently. So all smart guys went to business school, and nowadays, recent newspapers say that in SNU, the most popular department was business, but since business is not that effective that much, it is not that. uhm.. appealing. they are moving up to engineering, because then the get better jobs, and when they have skills, they can learn business faster. You can train technicians and engineers in business

JS: in business yes..

YJ: but you cannot vice versa.

JS: yes that's actually true. That's smart. but also sort of like moving backwards. because from what I remember from Korean history, throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s, engineering was some of the most attractive and needed skills to move up from light industry to middle- and heavy industry, and this whole implementation of industrialization, so is it like.. it is almost like a circle, being completed. Now you are going back to engineering. Or maybe that is a weird metaphor?

YJ: no no it seems quite familiar, but uhm..

JS: but are there any demand for.. is there an increasing demand for engineers in Korean society these days?

YJ: exactly. Better to get a job, much easier, much easier. I have 8 close friends, among them 4 went to college, 1 majored in engineering - he got a job in 3 months. The other guys, it took like one and half year.

JS: I see. What do you do between graduation and getting a job? If you say that the custom is to wait a year or a year of a half?

YJ: You have to prepare for a test, you know I told you earlier. Test, you have to prepare. Resumé, personal statements, as mostly what they do.

JS: Are there any kind of welfare schemes for youth unemployment or any job centres or.. I think that would be a little bit interesting to hear more about.

YJ: in Seoul, we do not have one.

JS: yes, okay.

YJ: but you know, when you go to Gyeonggi-do (Gyeonggi province), Seongnam city, recently there is a presidential candidate, whose name is Jae-myung Lee (Lee Jae Myung)

JS: oh, he is the major of.. yes I think I have heard about that guy

YJ: yes, he has become very popular, very progressive person, who gives "ssuda", it means like a portion of money when they are preparing to be employed.

JS: ok, so they do something, and get something in return?

YJ: Not really. They do not do something. They those someone who is underprivileged, who is looking for a job. And then they support them with money, around 500USD (300-500USD)

JS: and is that acceptable, is it enough?

YJ: it is not enough

JS: but it is a help

YJ: it does help, because.. I also did a similar interview with my friends and.. you know what "hubbae" is?

JS: ahh no:

YJ: we Koreans are conservative, very sensitive with age

JS: oh yes

YJ: if you are older, it means that I should show more respect - literally - with language.

JS: Yes I am currently learning Korean so I know about these 4 levels of politeness and how you put the "yo" behind and these kind of things. And if you are older than me, I would always address you with "Hyuong"

YJ: yes exactly

JS: ok

YJ: uhm, they say that the toughest part is, when they graduate from school, they are looking for job right.

JS: yes

YJ: and during that process, people who are less wealthy, compared to others, they have work, and when they come back home they have to prepare for employment, resumé, CV or whatever it can be. So each semester, and each year, all these guys who graduate from college, actually they postpone their graduation about a year or two. Because there is nowhere to go. If you look around school coffee shops, you might see a lot of guys working on their CVs. Nowadays, coffee shops are no more a place to drink coffee and have a conversation, it became a place like a quiet library.

JS: yes, that is actually what I have noticed. And some cafés have directly implied something like "library café" for example. I went to holly's the other day, 2 of the floors were dedicated to library.

YJ: Did you see what they are doing? about 20-30% are college students working at mid-terms or any other assignments, but the majority of those guys are mostly looking for jobs. They cannot go back. There is a psychological burden when they go back to school library. have you heard about "umchi" it means literally "measure from eye"

JS: so that is like judgement or..

YJ: yes judgement, exactly. Korea, and also other asian countries including Japan, is a high context society. We have to repeat those behavior, if you don't like it, you don't just say it out loud. Instead, you give them "umchi"

JS: okay, so that is the.. ?

YJ: yes, the measurement, yea. So they go back to library, problem is they see a lot of younger guys, asking "Oh, what are doing here". "oh, I am looking for a job".. that means I am not really a brilliant or I don't have ability.

JS: So are they losing face?

YJ: confidence! Self-confidence. They come out, it is really embarrassing for them to meet a professor. They will ask, didn't you graduate? I did, but I am looking for a job. They don't want to say this. So what they do is not going to library. They come to coffee shop. This is a place for them, to..

JS: where they can hide, fit in.

YJ: yees.. at home, their parents give them "umchi".. "What are you doing here?"

JS: oh yes

YJ: They are actually stressed. This is the last place for them to go. Yes.

JS: okay, that is kinda interesting how you transform a public sphere into something really new.

YJ: maybe.. there is a book called "bowling alone"

JS: yes I have heard about that

YJ: .. during the 1960s in the US. it was written by putnam, robert putnam. because that bowling is a group sports. but it started became an individual sport. it was under the surface that people had an individual life, they were not actually joining a group or community, because the whole society was changing to an individualized after the wave of neo-liberalism. And Korea, such students coming out to find a job, this place is actually.. on cord with my research.. this place is becoming more and more individualized, there is no conversation. If you see around, there is no people drinking coffee except from that lady over there. Who is working at some stuff. So..

JS: well, that is true.

YJ: And this afternoon, during the break, is it less crowded. This is what is happening in korea.

JS: just for the record, there are 6 individuals in total, (at this floor of the café) all sitting alone with their computers. It is really interesting. I have not thought about it too much before, but when you mention it, it..

YJ: .. makes sense, yes.

JS: are there any other places you could go besides from cafés like are there.. suppose during the winter time, it's difficult to use the outside public areas, but maybe during summer? Would you see people going somewhere outside alone. But then you have a problem with being connected.

YJ: There is a problem. Korea is not really uhm.. compared to the united states, they are not really active. physically. So what they do. have you heard about all these "PC-bangs" (pc-café),

JS: yes yes yes

YJ: Do you have them in copenhagen?

JS: yes. "playstation bangs" too right?

YJ: Yes. There are not a lot of sport activities you can do outside, when you look around. What do you call that, the soccer field? There's only one, and it is really hard to get. you have to reserve for it. it is really hard to access.

JS: sure, so it seems you lack some green areas, parks and such.. you have the han-gang (han River), a few areas right. but maybe it is very restricted?

YJ: it is because it is far. People who live around that area, that's why the price is really expensive around han-gang, han river, the price is high. But areas around "silimdong", it's quite cheap. If you see, there are not a lot of facilities.

JS: sure.

YJ: So, they go to the gym, a few. but uhhh. yes.. There is no where else, expect from coffee shops these days. That's why you see a lot of cafés today. Because you can make money from this place.

JS: are there any.. I have noticed there are not really any tradition for sitting outside and dining or "cafeing" or anything. In copenhagen and most other places in Europe, most of the café would be located outside, on a square, or something like, in a little green area. Do you have anything similar to that, in Seoul? Maybe outside Seoul?

YJ: if you go to gangnam station, or shinsa-yo, or itaewon, are really hot areas. They are already merged as hot places among the younger generation. They have mimic, like all those european style cafés, but the majority of the cafés as you can see like this place is actually contained. We don't prefer outside, it is not really common. We try to hide, there is a culture. A tradition. We don't actually show. We are reluctant to expose ourselves, that is why we are more contained. And I think that applies well to locations like coffee shops and like that.

JS: you mention that people are going to the gym. Do you feel like there has been an increase in Korean society amongst young people to exercise more like fitness and like worshipping the body and doing more about being muscular

YJ: It has been growing

JS: yea?

YJ: gradually

JS: this is just a notion, because I came to Korea the first time in 2013, when I did an exchange at Konkuk University, and as far as I remember back then, I never saw any types of advertisements for fitness centres, but these days, I feel like it is very visible - like these before and after pictures, and very muscular guys and females posing in different positions, it is like you can see it. but it is just a notion..

YJ: it is true it is true, because you couldn't find a lot of fitness centres or gyms around anywhere, but you got it right. Recently, worship of how you look and how muscular you are, has been merging recently, approximately about 5-6 years ago. that is why the prices are going down, because of the competition between the gyms

JS: ah sure

YJ: and uhm, yes yes, that is what is like.

JS: okay so these days it is not that expensive going to the gym?

YJ: it is affordable. it used to be really expensive, and big gyms don't accept membership, like monthly membership

JS: no?

YJ: it is like package, 3 months, 6 months, a year

JS: oh ok

YJ: and yes, you have also a lot a frauds. You open a gym and then close after they get..

JS: sure

YJ: it was on the newspapers as well, they say be careful, don't pay for a large chunk of money

JS: yes so don't pay money up front

YJ: yes

JS: okay cool. I don't know if this is connected to anything, but when you say Koreans are little bit closed and such, that is like the opposite. Because by exercising and doing fitness and such, you want to show yourself to the rest

YJ: it is changing. Among the younger generation they are becoming more outgoing and you know, facebook.. before facebook we had an SNS called Cyworld, it was a korean version of facebook. after the introduction to facebook people started switching over, and SNS is quite similar among.. all around the world.

JS: Yes it seems like it

YJ: they are losing their traditions.. and from my perspective, my interpretation. there are some symbols of.. during 1990s, mid90s, there were some singers, and their songs implied to be rebellious to the older generation or the yes...

JS: that was during the 70s or?

YJ: no the 1990s.. 1990s..

JS: ok, that is not so long time ago

YJ: So sometimes there were some small movie clips popping up on facebook showing that uhm.. I think that was a start, people starting to get out of home, leave home.

JS: yes

YJ: and make up like drinks.. we don't have drugs, it is not like common in Korea. So what they used to do was you know the glue.. very strong glue.. they put in a bag and breath it in, it has a similar effect to drugs. They used to that, I don't know why it is not coming out in the newspapers any more.

JS: yea

YJ: and uhm cocaine, heroin and marijuana, it is really not common in Korea. but recently, people are introducing these kind of stuff in clubs. You know, these kind of movie stars, they are bringing in.. it is quite often broadcasted in the news media as well. but uhm, there was something I wanted to say but.. anyways..

JS: uhm, what is the consequence if you get caught? doing drugs..

YJ: once, if it is the first time, they are quite lenient. if it is actually accumulated, it becomes a big problem.

JS: okay, so if you distribute it, sell it.

YJ: it is going to be a big issue, big issue.

JS: okay, so that is why there is no such culture of.. I mean, when you compare it to the united states for example, would you say the punishment is more harsh in Korea?

YJ: it is lenient!

JS: yea? so how come it is not more widespread?

YJ: that is a good question. Well frankly speaking, I am not really good with legal terms and

JS: yes yes that is fine.. but I have always heard it is really harsh

YJ: well that could be correct too, the legal stuff, forget about what I said haha

JS: Nah it is fine, it is not really about the facts, it is more about how you perceive them

YJ: I am not really prone or normally knowledgeable about that.. it is only my perspective

JS: alright sure. Well okay, let's move back to hell Joseon.

YJ: okay.

JS: When was the last time you heard somebody mentioning the expression?

YJ: It always pops up on facebook

JS: okay, so SNS, social media or social networks.. is that the main arena where you stumble upon the expression?

YJ: yes I guess. or when you look up the major.. the majority of koreans are using Naver, the SN, it pops up quite often on that website.

JS: and how is that working? it pops up on naver? is it because..

YJ: When it pops up on naver, there is a lot of readers. it is the main domain, when you just open.. click on chrome..

JS: so is it on the main site? there is a title? Because i am not very familiar with Naver..

YJ: oh okay

JS: since i don't read korean yet.

YJ: okay, this is Naver (showing on smartphone) people search up for information or whatever it can be on this website. So when you press that application and you open it on the internet, there is all those news that pops up!

JS: oh I see, you right now you have choi soon-sil, ban ki moon (different news-titles on the main site at the moment looking at the screen)

YJ: yes yes exactly. It helps you.. sometimes, pretty often it (Hell Joseon) pops up on these news.

JS: and this news overview, there are five main articles, right?

YJ: yes

JS: and are those news the most read articles? or is the newest ones?

YJ: they re-organize it..

JS: how come it is those articles you can find? and not something else?

YJ: they.. they.. I think the Naver, people working at Naver they organize this.

JS: okay, so there is some sort of algorithm?

YJ: yes but I am not.. i don't know.

JS: Okay what I am trying to get to is. if there is a major title with hell Joseon, is it because it has been read by a lot of people or is it because of something else?

YJ: okay, they can actually show it all. That why it pops up here. and this is the urgent increased keywords. So if you press this, it says that what was recently searched the most was.. introverted boss, retirement drink, shot, and ban ki moon.

JS: this also plays a big role. Because people search for what other people has searched for

JS: yes exactly, so it is sort accumulating or taking form whenever it is.. alright, so on this site you would frequently encounter this expression (hell joseon) or maybe not so frequently?

YJ: Hell Joseon is more what you look for.. find on facebook

JS: okay

YJ: my friends on facebook are around my age, so they are quite.. they complain a lot about this situation. so they.

JS: so in you newsfeed, there would pop up different small blogpost or whatever you call that, using the expression of Hell Joseon?

YJ: yes

JS: and what would it be connected to? if you just have one example of a friend posting something, what would be the context?

YJ: Oh, it is not only about the progressive guys using this term, as you know

JS: yea yea

YJ: because after you get employed, you have to work until 10, 10pm. or 11pm. Hyung-sik told me he cannot come back to Korea. This is really hell, why is that? he says he only works about 5 hours a day at café. That's it? he says yes. And people say I am pretty good worker.

JS: yea

YJ: 5 hours a day and you are a pretty good worker. And he said, it is pretty good money. okay, but in Korea it is not only about how much you work. You have to wait until your boss leave. This is a pretty common custom.

JS: oh yes

YJ: so if you are my boss, and I finish my work, and I want to leave around 5 or 6 pm, if you just leave.. after you leave, now you will be chewed out.

JS: oh, so that is when you see they eyes? (the nunchi expression discussed earlier in the interview)

YJ: yea, you can't even imagine. It is almost impossible.

JS: yea, so this is something I have always been wondered. Because legally, I reckon you have the right to leave job when your time is due. Or have can i say? You have a contract saying you work 40-50 hours a week

YJ: yes

JS: and legally you would have the right to just walk out of office when are done working?

YJ: you can do that in Korea.

JS: okay, so there are some..

YJ: if your boss doesn't leave, you can't leave.

JS: and the consequence is just to??

YJ: to stay there! when I ask these guys what do you guys do after 6 o'clock when you are done with your work?

JS: yea, sure!

YJ: They say that doesn't matter. you can't leave. there is an air you can't leave. when your senior is sitting there. it is impossible. it is almost impossible.

JS: oh, just take a break if you need to (phone calling)

YJ: no it's okay, it's my wife.

JS: So, it is almost impossible. that is why there was a recent news. this is has been a real issue in Korea. the working hours is not effective, it is not efficient. When I hear from the US or from the UK, they don't have time keeping in. And what i notice is that in the states the break time is 4 minutes, between period. we have to move from class to class, we only have 4 minutes.

JS: oh, during college?

YJ: during undergrads

JS: ok

YJ: no no no, high school

JS: but 4 minutes?

YJ: yea, you don't have time, you have to go to a locking with your stuff, there's not a long time for conversation, chatting, you can only chat during lunch time in the states. But in korea, it's quite different. There is a lot of smoking time, it is very loose. Except few companies, really intense companies. i heard that. what my wife told me while she was working in a company, it was unfair for ladies.. because, she does not smoke. but guys they like every hour they go out for smoke. it is not just for smoking, it's for relaxing

JS: yea right.

YJ: so, as you can see, the time span during working hours is not really tense.

JS: sure, what all those breaks and you add it up, you maybe have a whole hour or? or one and a half where you are not doing anything?

YJ: yes, I mentioned it during my undergraduate, and my canadian professor said the same thing. You know, Koreans, I know they work for a long time, but it is really ineffective, because. to much break time, coffee time. When they come in the morning they have coffee, tea. it's a break, right?

JS: sure

YJ: in a canadian perspective, I think this is very inconvenient, less effective, ineffecient, they have to make it condense! This is why we have other issues. You know, fathers not coming home. to nurture a child, there is a portion of the father who has to take in.. participate in. but when they come home back at 10 or 11, they don't have time to spend time with each other. that is why our generation they don't really hunger for success that much. So, one pretty good job in korea is the public officers, they want to work for the government, this is a really good job.

JS: oh okay, so a bureaucratic position

YJ: yes, they have good pensions, they are recognized pretty well, and.. but.. and this is becoming a stronger phenomena if you go to a private company, you get laid off at your 40s or your 50s, and after you are done, you have to live until you are 90.. That is why you can see a lot of chicken.. chimaek.. because after retirement, they have to do something, and what they look for? since they have been working private companies, they don't have any particular skill that can longer their..

JS: So it is so specific what you know, because you get training in one company, that when you get laid off are not working there, you can't just transfer your knowledge to new somewhere else?

YJ: hm they don't employ you, when you are in your 40s or 50s

JS: already by the age of 40/50, then you become very unattractive to the labour market?

YJ: yes, of course..

JS: okay, and then their alternatives would be the chicken shops?

YJ: yea the chickens or private restaurants. but since they are not really prone to running a business, majority of them - 90-95% - they go out of business in a year or two. And that is all

their pension all the money that you were planning to spend throughout your life, it's all gone. so that is why they are looking to become public officers, become a bureaucrat. Because, at least you life pretty well until you die.

JS: hm sure. So it is more secure in a sense?

YJ: is it more secure yes.

JS: aha okay.. uhm you mentioned you are married.

YJ: yes.

JS: do you and your wife live together?

YJ: yes we do.

JS: okay, and you don't have any kids?

YJ: no, not yet. I am waiting until 2 or 3 years from now

JS: So do you have a plan? Is it something you talk about? when is time and such..

YJ: yes we do. I want my child or children to have US citizenship.

JS: okay, so you do have a concern for your children or.. how come you want your children to have a US citizenship?

YJ: if you interview other Koreans, I might be a very exceptional case. Because you might find it hard to.. Koreans, we don't usually speak english.. And unlike other koreans, I spent 1/3 of my life in the States,

JS: so 8 years?

YJ: yea 8 years. So I am a more pro-US values, and I want to raise my child in the states, and I don't want my child to become a korean.. I don't want them to spent 2 years in the military service, it was quite unproductive, especially during your early 20s, it is a really productive age, but yea, all you have to do is very simple labour.. and yea, what a waste of time!

JS: okay. So you did.. you paid your due to the military?

YJ: I did.

JS: how was that?

YJ: it was uhm.. a waste of time

JS: how long time was it, 24 months?

YJ: 23 months..

JS: okay, so they are slowly reducing it? you said today it's only 22..

YJ: 22.. 22.. It was president Noh, Noh moo-hyun, who was trying to reduce it to 1 and 1/2 year.

JS: How did that go?

YJ: ah you know, the military officers was resistant to this idea, since a progressive party came in. But it was pretty good for them. Now you know.. I was paid only 20USD a month, when a private 1st class

JS: 20 dollars?

YJ: 20 dollars, moved up to 50 dollars, and when I was sergeant i received around 100 bucks.

JS: okay, and when did you become a sergeant?

YJ: uhm, it is 6-6-7-4 months. There are classes as a soldier. There is 1 linje, private. 2 line, is private 1st class, 3 line is corporal, and then 4th line is called sergeant.

JS: ok.

YJ: you have to spend 6 months during 1st rank, 6 months, then 7 months and then 4 months.

JS: Okay, and are you automatically moved up the ranks? or can you do something that prevents you from it?

YJ: uhm, it is not really common, because you know, uhm, these soldiers are not really eager or enthusiastic to serve their count.. to serve as a soldier. Because they are actually recruited.. recruited, right?

JS: yes, it's called national transcription, and you are sort of forced into it.

YJ: yea forced into it. It is really not common, but sometimes, there are some programmes if you pass a test or training test, showing that you are really excellent soldier, like.. there is a certain standard that you have to pass. if you pass that, we call it special list, and there is a month early - what do you call it - promotion!

JS: ah sure, so you can do something to move the ranks faster, but it is..

YJ: there's only a few guys who are really eager, really enthusiastic captains who wants to show a really good result or accomplishments, showing that my soldiers have been working really really hard for a faster promotion.

JS: ok sure. Does it help you after-career to say "I did my military service with good grades?" Is it something that can give you an advantage afterwards?

YJ: this was a very big issue. those who served their country, we should give them some extra points when they are being employed at public office or in companies. But ladies, have been resisting. this is not a good idea, not a fair idea.

JS: well since they are not transcribed?

YJ: yes, that is why if they have a headstart, it is going to be unequal, unfair, so it has been a really really heated issue about a decade ago, and uhm..

JS: do guys consider it unfair, that females are not forced into military service?

YJ: they don't care. it is already absorbed in our day. I am, I feel it is unfair. This is my perspective.

JS: yes yes sure.

YJ: they say, females should be treated fairly to men

JS: yea in all parts of society

YJ: and that's a good idea, that's okay. the fastest way to do that, would be to join the military. you don't have to fight, you can become a nurse. just serve your country for two years, just like us. then whatever you quest, I think that can be fair. They are only requesting their rights, but where is the responsibility?

JS: yea sure. Okay, so are there any female movements pushing for an equal national transcription?

YJ: yes

JS: Okay so there are movements of women who wants to join the military service?

YJ: Yes, that is recently why in Sungsin women's university the ROTC,

JS: RO.. ?

YJ: the ROTC. those who becomes an officer.

YJ: leaves for the bathroom for a couple of minutes.

JS: going back to your plans for kids and everything, you mentioned you wanted them to be US citizens.

YJ: Yes.

JS: Would you like them to live in the US as well then? Is that your..

YJ: my plan?

JS: yes?

YJ: okay so. I spent my childhood in the states, and when I compare the Korean system, the education system, I realize that the US education is much better

JS: Ok. throughout the whole..

YJ: Yes. Our education system is way to focused on just scrambling information, that's all we do. that's all we do. We don't have much time to think, we just have a lot of workloads, a lot of stuff to memorize, that's all.. i've been realizing. I think the US system, education system, is where they focus more on.. it's more balanced, that is what I think.

JS: Yes.

YJ: I don't want my child to just keep on reading books during the childhood, what I want them to do is go and join sports and activities, I think that is more important during teenage years.

JS: yea yea yea.. and are there any other aspects of the US that you also find more attractive, or is it mainly the education system?

YJ: education system yes. There's some racist issues in the states. but uuhm..

JS: like being a minority of asians or?

YJ: that is one thing that is actually pulling you back, but the rest of that is much better.

JS: So did you discover this yourself while you were abroad, that there is a..

YJ: yes yes

JS: okay, and how with the current.. president stuff and all, it could be emerging? I don't know, it's difficult to.. but..

YJ: Racism issues is going to come up to the surface, that is happening quite often in the states, that's what we see in the news.

JS: It is, but it also depends on where you base yourself in the states. I suppose you can also find very progressive and open minded and multicultural areas.. I hope so, i think so. but what about you wife, how does she feel about living in the states?

YJ: She says that, ultimately she wants to come back to korea. But during the 30s, I think she also thinks it is much better.. cause she is following me, she think it is worth it. But she doesn't really care what citizenship we have, but she believes living in a very clean environment would be good.

JS: like clean environment without pollution or?

YJ: yes.

JS: so that is a concern as well. the actual environment.

YJ: Yes.

JS: well I can, I usually hear that popping up as well. the fine dust and everything.

YJ: and, we invest in a lot in english, a lot! So that is why

JS: and when you say "we"?

YJ: As korean.

JS: yes.

YJ: and there is a saying that if you want to go to a good college, you should study math. If you want to get a good job, you should pretty good at english. but you know, if you go to Gangnam station.. how long have you been in Korea?

JS: uhm, first time I was here for half a year in 2013 during an exchange, and then I've been back 4 times since, for one month, one month and so. So I am pretty familiar with Seoul now, but I still need to discover the rest of the country.

YJ: Okay, so do you know what a "Hagwon" is? Hagwon.. hagwon.. It is a private education academy.

JS: oh yes, a cram school or whatever you would translate it into.

YJ: right. So if you go to gangnam station or jongro, there is a lot of cram schools, academies, private academies that teaches TOEIC, TOEFL, preparing students to public a public officer. And this a huge business in korea, very huge business.

JS: As in, it is good money for the..

YJ: excellent money, they make a lot of money

JS: ok

YJ: The one of the major companies called hagwodo (hackers)

JS: and are they Korean owned.. or

YJ: Korean

JS: okay so it is not foreigners coming and setting up big companies

YJ: no these are already huge. Because, education is one good path, path to make money. smart guys they come here and sell knowledge. and uhm, the reason why I am saying this, is, a lot.. since elementary, middle and high-school, they (parents) invest a lot of money learning english, but they don't..

JS: from your own.. they don't receive any support for it?

YJ: Only parents support. But it is not effective enough. So what they do. this was an article from 2007, about a decade ago. Chinese foreign students who were studying in the States, was 100.000 students, and koreans were 110.000.. you know, if you compare the number of the population..

JS: oh, so yes, so percentage wise..

YJ: but japan was only 30.000. Because they can actually reproduce knowledge in Japan. You know, they got one nobel prize. But in Korea, if you want to learn.. it is changing a bit but.. if you see professors in major schools, they all have US PhDs

JS: that's actually true

YJ: they don't stop there. Earlier, elementary, middle and high-schools, parents.. rich families, sent their kids to the states to learn english. This is a huge investment. And if you see the children of the major corporations, they have already been educated with all these kinds of foreign education.

JS: so would you say that. you have SKY (the top the universities in Korea, Seoul national university, Korea university and Yonsei University), and then you have the American or British universities for that matter. What is.. what is the hierarchy?

YJ: Seoul National University.

JS: Still?

YJ: Network. Human Network.

JS: So a national degree is more important than a foreign. finding a job-wise and??

YJ: So it depends on which university you went to in the united states. If you went to harvard or IVY League or universities top ranking, it is pretty good. But apart from education, the human network you have.. it is much better to go..

JS: to one of the SKY universities?

YJ: yes cause they are already the major leaders, leading this country, this network is very huge. Hakyeon, jiyeon and hyulyeon.. these are the three language terms that you use. if you are from the same family, or the same region, or the same school.

JS: the same school as well? it is almost considered a family tie or..

YJ: it is very strong yes, very strong.

JS: so there is definitely some social capital to gain from staying in korea and enrolling to one of the major universities?

YJ: it is very strong yes. When the government changes, the people changes as well. They employ the people from same school.

JS: yea and then you have the whole circle of favoring each other and.. okay.. there is another expression in Korea. I can't remember it in Korean, but it is the "dirt spoon" and the "gold spoon".

YJ: uhum, "Kumsujeo and heuksujeo"

JS: yes exactly. How would you, if you were to compare and put that in connection to Hell Joseon?

YJ: it is really strong and very related.

JS: how? how?

YJ: it depends on which family.. the wealth of the family decides.. it decides your life. Because, we are saying that uhm.. moving up to higher social status, moving up the social ladder, it used to be very flexible and easily accessible..

JS: used to be? Are we talking a decade or two decades, or when would you?

YJ: A decade or two. I am not really sure.

JS: okay just to be sure, I can always look up some statistics or something.

YJ: maximum two decades.

JS: okay cool.

YJ: because, in Korea, the most preferred job is doctor, judge, prosecutor or lawyer. There is a company called "Linking couples for marriage" have you heard about it?

JS: yes I think so, they are sort of ranking you, right?

YJ: They rank you, based on which school you went to, how much your parents have, based on all these yardsticks.

JS: how much your parents have?

YJ: yes because it is heritage. How much you can get. but uhm..

JS: so in order to find a partner, they would..

YJ: rank you

JS: and measure you, based on your family ties as well. not just on your own accomplishments?

YJ: Marriage is not between individuals in Korea. If you want to marry, we need permission from parents. This is quite a different perspective. the reason why is, the Korean family are strongly related to each other. You know, if you marry someone.. I am sure about copenhagen or denmark, or western countries, it is something about.. let's say my wife is "Mary" and I am "mike", Mike and Mary they decide to marry, they propose, and then they announce it to their families, right?

JS: ah yea yea

YJ: But in Korea, what we do before.. before we need permission from our parents. That is why we introduce the spouse before the proposal. This is because Korea was traditionally based on a large family, it was a large family, because they did a lot of farming. So when a person comes in, that means they are an asset to that family.

JS: sure

YJ: That is why they preferred males.

JS: because the male one is the one who is getting the asset? If you have a daughter, you "outsource" her?

YJ: yes sure. Very traditional families, they still, when they have asset or money or running a restaurant, they don't tell the recipe to daughters, because they believe that if they tells this to daughters, they will find another man and it is going to be split up. So they prefer sons to inherit the asset of the company. **JS:** okay, wauw.

YJ: This is very strong, very traditional families. not all. but we still have them.

JS: there must be some development these days, I suppose. Also when it comes to the priority of having a boy or a girl. Do you think it is still preferred to have a son over a daughter?

YJ: No.

JS: no?

YJ: no. but traditionally this has happened. But I should also mention that it depends on the children's economical status. For example, if I am a.. even though I am not.. I was born in a middle ranked family, or a poor family, if I make my own money, and if support my family, the influence is very minimal.

JS: ah yes okay.

YJ: "I am responsible for my wife, I don't need your money".. they don't say this out, but they sense this...

JS: yes. So actually, it is more outspoken if you are born into a wealthy family. Then the marriage would be more of a family thing? or how can I understand this?

YJ: yes, you could say that. My wife is teaching at apgujeong, she is teaching english. apgujeong is the wealthiest part of town.

JS: is it the Hapjong area?

YJ: Yes, it is a very wealthy area. And children coming to learn english are those who's been studying abroad. She has been working for almost two years, and she said that wealthy kids, kids from wealthy families, especially from those.. uhm, parents who run a business, even though they are only 10 years old, they are already sensitive about the money issue. They should act well! Not all, just some, I should limit this..

JS: yes sure

YJ: they are very sensitive with money, so they want to have their money.. they want to inherit their money later on, so they try to behave well.

JS: already at the age of 10?

YJ: yea, you could say they are behaving spoiled, is this the right term?

JS: and is that, the kids you mentioned, are those the children of the golden spoon? or?

YJ: golden spoon yes, "kumsecho" yes.

JS: and in relation to Hell Joseon, you said there was a strong connection?

YJ: okay. how can we connect it?

JS: Yes?

YJ: if you are born in a golden spoon family, you don't have to worry about how long the preparation of seeking job is, because you get supporting. If you want allowance, they give you money. But if you were born in the uhm..

JS: the dirt spoon? or whatever we call it.

YJ: you have to work and prepare at the same time. That's why you lack behind, if you have 24 hours a day, you sleep 5 hours a night, you still have 19 hours right?

JS: oh god, yea.

YJ: and after.. you have to work 12 hours, and then only have 7 hours left..

JS: to prepare for?

YJ: to get a job, yes.

JS: right.

YJ: on the other hand, let's say that if you are golden spoon guy, or from a golden spoon family, you can sleep for 10 hours and you still have 14 hours left which you can spend on preparing for a job. That is what make you...

JS: so they have an advantage? when it comes to employment and advancing society?

YJ: yes.

JS: but do you think the golden spoon children would still relate to the notion of Hell Joseon? Or do you think it is something very far away from them.

YJ: They are more sensitive. They are already exposed to Hell Joseon. Because there's too much competition. and as I mentioned earlier, the mayor of seongnam, that's is why he is trying to figure this out, he wants to solve this situation because young generation looking for a job who hasn't got a lot of money from a dirt spoon family, he wants to support them with money, that's why they can actually focus on finding a job.

JS: okay, to sort of alleviate the inequality

YJ: yes.

JS: but my point being was, those golden spoon kids, with the advantages, do they also perceive..

YJ: hell Joseon?

JS: Yes Korea as Hell Joseon?

YJ: I don't think so.

JS: no?

YJ: Why should they, because they are already living in a paradise.

JS: yes they are, but then again, you mentioned something about how marriage is not an individual thing, but a family thing, and coming from a wealthy family you still have to take these things into consideration. So maybe.. I am just thinking aloud. Maybe they would have another perception of Hell Joseon? being something.. like family pressure, social control?

YJ: Hmm nope, I don't think so! People with golden spoon, they are not really sensitive with social economic fluctuation, because they already got a buffer-zone called family.

JS: sure, sure.

YJ: I have friends, female friends, there is a word called "sijip" - it means getting employed in a good family, or getting employed.. it actually means getting married with a big guy.

JS: so, what I would translation into some sort of "gold-digger"?

YJ: exactly, that would translate as well. But uhm, it doesn't match exactly like the gold digger, a poor women and a rich guy, a cinderella story, but it doesn't happen that much. But how they transfer their wealth is.. if you come from a wealthy family, then she marries a doctor or a lawyer, who makes pretty good money even though he is poor. Outspokenly, they transfer each's assets. This guy who can take care of the wife and the family - who wants to find a good guy to take over the assets..

JS: oh, that is a smart merger, if you can call it that.

YJ: a realistic merger, yes.

JS: so it is still very practical in a sense.

YJ: yes. especially from those from a wealthy family.

JS: but wouldn't that be a concern for those from a golden spoon family?

YJ: in what perspective?

JS: say they fell in love with someone who doesn't fit into their parents perception of the right spouse or husband or something..

YJ: they (the family) would refuse it! This is why there are a lot of fights between child and parents.. This is a very good, unfortunate, story. One of the daughters of samsung.. she committed suicide.

JS: was it Lee Kunhee's (CEO of samsung) daughter?

YJ: Yes, because she wanted to marry someone which the parents refused to..

JS: yea.

YJ: so, only the story that was on the newspapers, this is why she committed suicide. but this is not only about a particular company, but it also applies to other families as well. Since I told you that I study family therapy, people from wealthy families and from poor families they come, but one concern from them is to find the right spouse, because they are considering transferring all the wealth to the child.

JS: okay, so it is even a concern for the parents. it is something they think of.. "my daughter and my son needs to find someone good!"

YJ: maybe it is not only assignment for the parents. It is an assignment. because they don't only focus on "hu hu, how my child will be happy", but they have to brag about it..

JS: sure, so it is something they can use themselves as a.. ?

YJ: The wedding is a time to show off, the social status of the husband..

JS: okay, and so all these concerns and issues, or whatever we call them, they are concerns but they are not related to Hell Joseon?

YJ: some of them are. they are less sensitive about the issues of Hell Joseon, golden spoon. Why should they be sensitive, because they already got a lot of economics..

JS: okay cool, but I am just trying to make this connection, because then in your view, it seems like Hell Joseon is mostly connected to socio-economic aspects

YJ: yes

JS: .. and not so much the family related.. more like sensitive issues? Do you see where I am going. There are some cultural things, and some socio-economic..

YJ: okay so, socially, when the society gets really harsh, and economically, the people, especially the poor people, it is really hard for them to find a job. and it also impacts their families as well. for example, if a child has to support his family, he has to make money to support his family. or maybe, if he doesn't have to support the family, at least he has to

sustain his own life. but without the help from the parents, there is no support. So the society is bad, in that condition, and also the family is underprivileged. The child from underprivileged families, we call them dirt spoon.

JS: Yes, exactly.

YJ: exactly. So I think it is really strong connected to society, tough times harsh times, and also, as i have already touched upon, that's after graduating college, they have a hard time finding a job, and this is the whole cycle of the poor people. The term of dirt spoon only refers to the underprivileged people, it's a brand new name, like a symbolic name. But without the name, we still have these poor people, right.

JS: okay, yes yes yes. So the concept of the golden and the dirt spoon, is it also something newly emerging, just like hell joseon, or is it something you have always been using within Korean language?

YJ: no it is recent, I think it was roughly the same time when the word Hell Joseon and golden spoon came out together, it's like a whole pack of sentences..

JS: yea yea sure, you get like a toolbox of different expression and then you can put words to situations and.. that's mainly what I am interested in, actually. How these words or expressions are being used.

YJ: Oh, maybe uhm, Hell Joseon comes first, social issues comes first, and based on some social issues, there are some exceptions, which are called golden spoons. And those with dirt spoon or silver spoon, they are exposed to these social economic situation and they are directly influenced by this phenomenon.

JS: Ok. so in terms of talking a little bit ahead. let's try to look 5 or 10 years ahead, do you think the notion of Hell Joseon will be even more outspoken, or do think it is going to withdraw again? I know it's pretty difficult to make a forecast like this, but still..

YJ: okay so the reason why.. economic wise, the reason why these terms are coming out, why they are appearing more, is because.. have you heard about ssauwekyungje, ssuawejokkyungje, there was a movement recently, they want to socialize the economy, this is such a stupid idea, they think they can actually spread the money or profits by actually making a law.. But what happens actually is.. I will give you one example, from france. Holland, president holland. When he became president, he announced that he is gonna levy tax on the rich and give that money to the poor

JS: Yes, distribution of wealth

YJ: did it work out? He retrieved it, he cancelled that agenda because, Louis Vuitton?

JS: yea the house of..

YJ: LVHM

JS: Yes, that must be the whole conglomerate.

YJ: I forgot his name, but he said that if you levy taxes to 65% percent in this country, you can not stop it, this is not democracy.. hm maybe netherlands, and also united kingdom said "we will prepare a red carpet, because you can come here and we will give you lesser tax".

JS: sure

YJ: so, Hollande decided to stop the..

JS: he stopped it. So I think that is what was called millionaire tax. And he cancelled it?

YJ: yea so economic experts say that. and there are some graphs and some figures explaining why this is happening, uhm. in 2015 the nobel prize, angus deaton won nobel prize, and his idea was, that polarization between poor and rich, is not because of the rich, it's because of the people left behind. There are all sort of flat, and only a few people reached wealth, and other people are remaining behind. What we are supposed to is not to drag these guys down, but to drag the other guys up.

JS: yes

YJ: this is the main idea

JS: sure sure

YJ: and why polarization and gold spoon and dirty spoon are happening and why it has become a catchy phrase, is because if you get on letting the companies not to work - there might be some people who disagrees with this idea - what happens most is that they will stop employing people. And stop employing people, the poor people will lose a chance to get a job

JS: Aha yes, so you believe in somewhat what we would classify as the trickle down economics?

YJ: I do.

JS: Okay okay, so now I see where your conservative views comes in. And that's interesting, because then what are supposed to..

YJ: the reason why I am saying this is because if they don't have time to get a job, what happens next is rich people continues being rich, but their lives are expectancy are.. the life expectancy in korea is 90, women 90 and men late 80s.

JS: Is it really that.. hm okay that's is way longer than in Denmark

YJ: They are expecting, because national pension are calculating based on life expectancy, so in they expect people to live longer and longer, and they have to cut down on national pension. So people with wealth continue being wealthy and people without wealth continues to be poor. And since our parents, my parents, they are born in last 4-6 children, but I only have one sister. So if time passes like this, the older generation will split the assets, so 100 dollars becomes 20 dollars to each for example, but with one child nowadays, all the wealth comes to one child, so this is why the inheriting.. they inherit a large portion of money, without talking about capitalism or the society.. this is why their wealth are keep on continuing, rich people are still being rich. There's no chance for poor people to come up in join this. This is why.. this is how some people interpret this..

JS: So your prediction with taking the super-aging society into consideration - I think that is what they classify like Korea and Japan as, those societies where in 20 years from now, 30-40 % will be above 60 or something - so your prediction will be that is only going to be more divided..

YJ: More divided

JS: between the golden and the dirt spoon

YJ: and the young generation has a lot of economic burdens to take care of the older generation. Now it is becoming a super old society in Korea, in 10 years, people around my age will only have one child, maximum two, but they are really hard to find, really rare.

JS: and why is it, you only have one or two children?

YJ: because they don't want to raise their child in this terrible situation. It is a cycle..

JS: That is good to have in mind, actually.

YJ: That is why we say that "sam-po", we give up three, five, seven or nine. We give up marriage, we give up jobs, we give up children. Marriage, job, child. It's a vicious cycle. Why we give up child, why we give up marriage is because we can't find a job. Since we can't find a job, we don't have money. And even if I have a portion of money from a small company, I don't have enough money to buy a house, that is why we give up house. And this is a vicious cycle. If we want to have a child, it is very very expensive, we don't really on public education. I mentioned about "hagwon", the cram-schools, cost a lot of money, so when we make a lot of money, even if we make money, you have to spend a large portion of income to child education.

JS: do you have any idea roughly how much a monthly..

YJ: 1.000 dollars

JS: one thousand dollars? a month? on one child? to make sure that it gets more education than what you are provided by the public?

YJ: It depends. Some people spend 10.000 dollars, but it starts from child. You know, English kindergartens, I heard it cost 3.000 dollars a month. Very expensive. 3.000 dollars a month. Since they are raised in an English environment, they are already having head-start.

JS: Okay. So that is.. like automatically you have to give these things up, unless you have.. hm.. and what is being done about it? are there any. if you to mention just a couple of examples.

YJ: Okay, the government.. what the government try to do in order to alleviate the private education system, they have an education system called Child Education Broadcasting Center - they broadcast competent teachers and they taught for a team, they were broadcasting it, and the government said that based on EBS these books, we will actually be.. the Suneung, the Korean SAT

JS: Yes yes

YJ: Will be from here. So everyone.. they tried to alleviate other private educational system by broadcasting it for free. making it accessible.

JS: okay, that makes sense.

YJ: That's what the government did. And secondly, that was the major thing... hm, no. there's actually no solution. Only competition is available in this country. We don't have any

actual resources. What our country is trying to do is to mimic the system of Sweden or northern European countries welfare systems to Korea, but we are resistant, A lot of conservatives are resisting, and they say, "it does not make sense", there's among the OECD.. we always talk about OECD

JS: yea sure, it is a measure..

YJ: yes a measure to the advanced countries.. right? But in Korea, the average GDP is way lower than the OECD countries, but the point of being is that they only talk about the welfare system.. making a welfare system that is similar to the northern European countries, we can make a better country, but on the other side we always ask this question - "what about the average of income that we make?" - we are not even half of Japan. How can we match the status to welfare of countries which has a higher GDP?

JS: Okay, so one way to look at it is to say that in order to reach the welfare state we first need to increase the GDP per capita to a certain..

YJ: Yes that's how the conservatives are approaching it. The progressives says "no"

JS: "it comes the other way around"?

YJ: yes exactly.

JS: Yes well, that's a tough nut to crack. What comes first, the egg or the chicken?

8.3 Appendix 3: Interview with Si-won

Date: 17th January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Siwon. Initials: SW

JS: So basically I just have one question which is "what is Hell Joseon?" and then we just going to take it from there

SW: What is Hell Joseon? Does it exist..

JS: yes

SW: Well I mean you have to understand that in Korea these kind of terms are very fashionable, and they come and come. So another example is "Kejoshi" and now the popular term is "Ajae"

JS: "Ajjae"?

SW: I don't know if you have heard of it, do you know the word "Ajoshi"?

JS: Yes yes sure, and I know the word "Ajogakeh" as well

SW: Yea sure so "Ajae" is sort of a cute way of referring to "Ajoshi" because "Ajoshi" has taken over such a negative connotation in Korea in 21st century. It is almost like a reaction against the.. and to redeem the middle-aged men

JS: Ah okay, to sort of de-demonizing them or?

SW: Right, and humanize them and maybe even make them a little loveable. So when you hear it in Korean, the word itself, it comes across as very cute.

JS: okay, and it is also a way of de-politing.. hm, because, "Ajoshi" is that a polite way of talking?

SW: Yea I mean, it is. but certainly it always had loaded meaning, just like "Azuma"

JS: yes sure

SW: Right, it is a very neutral word, but depending on the context, it can be a very negative one too.

JS: So, in terms of Hell Joseon?

SW: So Hell Joseon is one of those words that really came along and I didn't really see it so much until a couple of years ago and now it has really taken on this out-sized image.. but does it mean it really represents the current zeitgeist of Korea, or is something also fashionable that is going to go away of fashion soon.

JS: Sure.

SW: With regard to its usage, there are many theories. Once again, the problem with trying to track down the origin of discourse is that it is hard to say who came up with in the first place right?

JS: exactly exactly.

SW: So, a good example is a term called "Hannamchong" which basically means that all Korean men are like parasites or insects. And it is a term that is generally contributed to one online community called "megalina" which is seen as quite radically feminist.

JS: oh yes, I think you brought an article about it?

SW: Yes we had an article about it on the Exposé and it has actually been very widely read, so.. So that claimed the word.. Uhm, you can contribute it to a particular community, but there is no identifiable author.

JS: Yes.

SW: Same with Hell Joseon. The theory that I have read is that.. There is one online community called DC insight which covers basically anything and everything to do with Korea. politics, entertainment, society, and they had a section that is dedicated to history. And there was a debate over the nature of Joseon dynasty.

JS: oh okay, the ancient kingdom from 15 something to..

SW: from 1319 to 1910

JS: yes okay.

SW: and this dynasty, which has become very important in the way South Koreans think about the past.. and it is partly because it is the most recent dynasty, and it the dynasty that fell because of Japanese occupation

JS: yes.

SW: So, there has been a great deal of efforts made, specially the government, in trying to valorize the Joseon Dynasty as the true inheritor of Korean history. And uhm. Heritage, tradition, culture. So many of the things that people talk about as essentially Korean, are actually things that you see from Joseon, not necessarily from before. A good example is patriarchy.

JS: yes.

SW: You know, Joseon was well known for being a very patriarchal society, but when you look time before that, in koryo, is seems that there was more sense of gender equality - for lack of better term.

JS: I have actually heard about that before, yes.

SW: Right, so why do we invest so much of our interest, our passion in preserving the legacy of the Joseon dynasty?

JS: sure, if you can date it even longer back and say that we also used to have gender equality and such..

SW: Yes. So there is a very nationalistic dimension to the preservation and praising of Joseon.

JS: yes.

SW: Which you also see in the various attempted restoring traditional architecture around the country. which of course are Joseon Dynasty buildings which have been destroyed. But they are rebuilding them. And it is not just about the tangible, but also the intangible legacy that these architectural remains represents and that the government is attempting to restore it.

JS: Okay.

SW: it also does not hurt that the capital of Joseon is Seoul. As apposed to Pyongyang,

JS: oh, sure. that really adds some value to..

SW: yea, in trying to play up the legitimacy of the republic of Korea, Joseon becomes also important. As opposed to Koryo, or Koguryo, before the.. which are the north centered dynasties.

JS: So that is the Joseon dimension to Hell Joseon?

SW: Yes so the meaning of Joseon is very important. And then there we those who began to claim to Joseon was a very Hell'ish place.

JS: Yes.

SW: Yes, so that's why Hell Joseon came into mention.

JS: Sure. okay, and do you think it has an importance that you chose an english word to sort of put words on the notion of Joseon nowadays. Because you could probably also have found a Korean equivalent to "Hell" or?

SW: Yes, there are of course Korean equivalences to Hell, but it's uhm. A lot of internet discourse, in my opinion, is about wordplay. it is about making it catchy. So for example, this term that.. for some reason.. There, basically I have written two articles that have been read more than anything else I have ever written. One is a critique of South Korean education, the other one is my critique of Korea middle-aged men.

JS: Korean middle aged men?

SW: Yes, and it is called "Kejoshi" must die!

JS: oh, so it is like "kehseki" and "ajoshi" and?

SW: Yes

JS: I might have read that one as well

SW: So middle-aged men and entitlement. It is basically.. they are like dogs. So anyways, why "kejoshi"? Why is it so catchy? Well, there is something about this word that.. it about how you construct the term. And you can say, "Jiog Joseon", right? "Jiog" is the Korean word for Hell.

JS: yes.

SW: but it wouldn't have the same ring to it. Especially three syllable words are particularly I guess, it has a nice feeling to it when you say it.

JS: yes, linguistically.

SW: So for example, we mentioned the word "Hannamchung", once again three syllables. And then "Kimchinyon" you know it is the term to denigrate women.

JS: okay.

SW: And then there is once again three syllables. So I would argue that it is about the catchiness, of the sound of it, which is important when you try to construct these keywords and make them go viral. And since I don't really know the circumstances around the construction of this particular term, I cannot really say, but this is my own theory.

JS: Okay, so this is the construction of the world itself and the expression, why do you think it was necessary for someone to come up with an expression for this? I am also trying to figure out the notions behind and in what context you would use the expression and so forth..

SW: So, so they talk about Korea as a Hell Joseon.

JS: Yes.

SW: And this has a very important meaning for people who think about contemporary South Korea.

JS: Okay, so it is a contemporary.. it is reflecting something contemporary of society?

SW: it has come to reflect widespread sentiment inside South Korea, against the state of society today. But in the beginning it wasn't so much about that.. it was uhm. this is why people who used the term Hell Joseon to say that Joseon was actually a terrible place, they were actually accused of being secretly pro-japanese collaborators. Trying to influence historiography in Korea.

JS: okay!

SW: because if Joseon was such a terrible place.. Japan would have every right to come and civilize us

JS: Yes, you were "liberated" by them.

SW: Yes so it is very similar to the rhetoric of british empire. The bringer of light to these darks continents. Africa, india, bringing on civilization.

JS: yes, modernization.

SW: So there is that dimension to it, but regardless of this, what has happened is that people began to argue that well, we say Joseon was a Hellish place, but Korea remains a place that is very much like Joseon, therefore it is still Hell.

JS: yes.

SW: So suddenly, Hell Joseon is transported to 21st century South Korea.

JS: Okay.

SW: and it began to become.. it became a very influential term.

JS: okay, so do you think there are any resemblance between Joseon dynasty and contemporary Korean society? One thing is that it was Hellish, in a broad sense, but if you can be more detailed. Any underlined structures or cultural aspect? Something that also gives legitimacy to bring back the expression of..

SW: So this is the argument of the proponents of Hell Joseon are certainly making. And the issue that comes up time and again is inequality.

JS: uhum.

SW: Right. So inequality exist in every country

JS: sure.

SW: but what defines a feudal society is that inequality is inherited.

JS: yes.

SW: There are no means for you to transcend the class that you were born into. And now the question, the essential question in Korea is. "is it still possible for you to be a self-made man or self-made women?" Or "Are you relegated to be living in this particular social class"? Because of your virtue. Because of your birth.

JS: Okay.

SW: and in fact, one critical sign that.. Because my personal interest is actually in President Park Geun Hye. And I am giving a talk about her soon.

JS: where?

SW: The Somerset Palace for Royal Asiatic society.

JS: Will it be in english?

SW: It's in english yes.

JS: okay, I could attend that.

SW: yes, but I don't know if you are around that time, it is on February the 7th.

JS: Oh, I am leaving on the february the 1st unfortunately.

SW: Yes okay. Well, anyhow. So if you look at all the Korean Presidents, thus far, whether you agree or disagree with their policies or ideological orientations, one thing that becomes clear is that many of these are people who came from nothing. That went on to achieve power.

JS: yes

SW: right? So, even military dictator like Park Chunghee, can be said to be a self-made man.

JS: Yes, that's true. And he went against all odds, sort of. Even having a background of at some point flirting communism as far I remember.

SW: Yea, Kim Daejung, a dissident, and Ro Moohyun who basically became a human rights lawyer but came from poverty, I think he didn't actually attend high school.

JS: Yes, I think he is autodidactic.. What do you call that, when you are self-thought?

SW: Aha, he is self-thought. Yes he studied to pass the government administered high-school equivalency test to get his diploma

JS: okay.

SW: and then he went on to study, and passed his very difficult BAR exam in Korea that enables you to become a lawyer.

JS: okay.

SW: prosecutor, a judge. Actually, I don't remember these features very clearly

JS: yes I will be able to track these datas

SW: yes and confirm this. but regardless, and then even Lee Myung Bak, who everybody recognized did come from very poor background and went on to become the head of hyundai construction

JS: Sure.

SW: and then mayor of Seoul, and then President of South Korea. And then suddenly we have Park Geun-Hye, who has been an interesting person for many reasons. One thing is of

course that she is the first female president, but she is also someone who comes from an unquestionably privileged background.

JS: yes, in some sense.

SW: In some sense. So, but is that something that is limited to Park Geun-Hye? Looking around Korea, there has been the sense that actually the more and more people are like her.

JS: yes.

SW: when you look at the top companies, when you look at the top universities. The percentage of people who come from wealth. It is quite sizeable.

JS: okay.

SW: And on top of that, the share of amount of money you are expected to invest in private education in order to make sure your children..

JS: oh yes, the cram schools..

SW: achieve academic success.. and these are the things that I talk about in my essay on education. And that translates into household debt, right? It is expensive here to raise successful children, and household debt is growing and is a serious problem.

JS: and, does that fit into the notion of rising student debt?

SW: and then there is the issue of student debt yes.

JS: okay so that's two different things.

SW: it is two different things, you send them to school, but it is not the end. Schools have become increasingly more expensive in Korea just like in America

JS: yes and in Britain as well.

SW: So you have that end then it is not the end. When your child graduates from university, there is this prolonged period of job seeking which requires you studying for this english language ability test the TOEIC, and making sure you get good enough score on it, which requires going to cram school again. Many people do online video instructions and you pay for that. And then you get these various certificates that proves you are skilled in various areas like microsoft office, or other foreign languages even. You know, mandarin has become important. So there is a very prolonged period of job seeking, which is why many South Koreans, young South Koreans, end up not really getting employed until they are like thirty. Or late 20s or 30..

JS: Okay, and all these things that you need as a requirement, these qualifications, are there any thing provided by the state? Do you have any job centres where you can go and claim your unemploymentness and say "I want to learn this, or I want to learn that" or is it something you fully are responsible for yourself?

SW: Well much of the cost must be born individually. Right? Korea is known for being not much of a social welfare. Especially when it comes to helping young people. That has been a very controversial topic here, and it is the issue that really made the mayor of Seongnam, Lee Jae-myung, one of the top presidential contenders.

JS: ah yes.

SW: he made a name for himself by insisting on providing welfare to young people. Right? Monthly subsidies to people who are citizens of Seongnam below a certain age. And Seoul government tried to do the same, with the Mayor Park won-soon.

JS: who is also running to.. ?

SW: But he has been running into some stumbling blocks because the money doesn't just come from the local government, it is subsidized by the central government, and the central government is against this extensive welfare.

JS: okay.

SW: So that has been one of the battlegrounds, but Lee Jae-myung of Seongnam has been seen as very strong on this subsidy for young people not to mentioning the expansion of welfare for people in general

JS: sure.

SW: And that has really made him this progressive icon. And then he went on the benefit a great deal from the whole anti-park geun hye sentiment and the impeachment proceeding.

JS: yes yes yes

SW: Because he was saying all these kind of populist remarks that people on the left really wanted to hear, but nobody really would come out and say.

JS: okay. Is the guy who is famous for twittering as well?

SW: Yes, he is the twitter master. Actually, that is why some in the foreign press would call him South Korea's Donald Trump.

JS: but in a progressive manner?

SW: So it is a label that he truly resents. He insisted that he is South Korea's Bernie Sanders, not Donald Trump. But when it comes to the way he uses social media, to bolster his popularity has certainly been similar to the way Donald Trump has..

JS: sure. So in terms of results from this whole welfare scheme for the young and unemployed, has there been any positive results?

SW: it is too soon to say. But meanwhile, just going back to individual households.. So it is expensive. Basically. And then of course, let's say your child has a job, but there are a lot of expectations on parents to provide other things for children including, let's say, place to live, when the child is married, and that's where many people have not been living to live in monthly rentals, which are seen as inferior, and also expensive. So you need a sizable amount of cash to for the keep-money to get an apartment without rental or to basically buy one outright.

JS: alright.

SW: So you look around in Korea and there are people who can afford to do this, and there are those who are not able to. Which is why along with the term Hell Joseon, we started to talk about Korea as a class-based society, and then the talk of spoons began.

JS: Ah, the golden and the.. the dirt?

SW: Yes, golden spoon, silver spoon and the clay spoon.

JS: and the clay spoon? Where in the hierarchy is clay spoon?

SW: The clay spoon is the bottom line, some people also talk about bronze spoon, copper spoon. but anyway, the point is, and then with president Park geun-hye's friend, Choi soon-sil's daughter.. the running joke is that she is the diamond spoon.

JS: Yes, yes.

SW: Right? She is the ultimate spoon in South Korea

JS: yea, but now we caught her in Denmark.

SW: yea, now you caught..

JS: Well actually I think we had no idea she was there, until there was a journalist from.. was it..

SW: JTBC

JS: yes JTBC who came there and sort of tracked her down

SW: yea yea I mean why would Danish police really care about this one woman. It is funny though.. my boyfriend is german, so we talked a lot about this because uhm..

JS: Oh right, she is also connected to germany right? The shelve companies

SW: yea so, the shelve companies, and the hotel that the shelve company owns, a hotel in Schmitten near Frankfurt.

JS: ahh sure, yes.

SW: so we were talking quite a bit about that because he is two hours from Frankfurt and knows the region very well, and then he say that German police don't give a damn. But there is a tax issue, and about that the Germans care.

JS: Exactly. I think that is the perfect way of coming after.. especially in Europe when it comes to tax. Same thing in Denmark. We have no real notion about what is going on besides from the fact that she might be involved in tax avoidance and shelving companies..

SW: yea, not in Denmark it seems. But i haven't really followed that angle. Because there are too many angles, too many stories. Yesterday you know, they tried to issue an arrest warrant for the Samsung CEO, no.. the Vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the son of the Chairman. And all that, so everyday there is a new development in domestic news.. it is hard to follow. But anyway, what this whole underscores in Korea is again that this intense sense that "Yes, the society really has been stepped against people who do not have anything.

JS: yes.

SW: and everything that has been revealed through the Choi Soon-sil scandal really confirms the truth of South Korea's Hell Joseon. Which is why even a little before the Choi Soon-sil scandal really broke, Park Geun-hye gave her speech.. I think it was for the liberation day.

Presidents give the annual speech for liberation day on August 15, and one of the things she came out on against really the strongly, the president, is the whole idea of Korea as Hell Joseon. She didn't use the term, but everybody knew that is what she was referring to. She was talking about those who are denigrating, who are ridiculing South Korea as a place that does not provide opportunities, that has become hard to live in, where success does not come - even if you try - these are all people who are standing in the way of progress. We need to continue the course that.. basically, without saying it..

JS: wauw, that is..

SW: Yes. Her father has said.. this idea of hard work.

JS: So she directly criticized or more or less directly criticized the users of the expression and notion of Hell Joseon.

SW: Yes. and basically, the broad leader of the leftist fraction. right?

JS: and what was the response?

SW: Well the response have been very clear, since the scandal broke. One of Park Geun-Hye's favorite words was "Nolyeok" - "Effort" - and then people started making fun of it. Even before Choi Soon-sil scandal.. people say "Noolyeok", not "Nolyeok". It is also a kind of word play.

JS: yes okay.

SW: huh, to emphasize the sound of it, to make fun of it. It is like "ooh, so if we make EFFORT"..

JS: Yes like that is all it takes.

SW: "if we work HAARD".. It is that kind of connotation.

JS: okay so with an ironic distance to the whole.. the sincerity of her..

SW: Yes. And then you see people like Choi Soon-sil or Chung Yo-raa.. Did they really make an effort? Well they did really try hard to do lots of things, but this is not really the kind of effort that you..

JS: it is the wrong doing..

SW: Right. In running a criminal enterprise. So now basically, the whole discrediting of the government and the political institution.. it has really been.. it has served as a confirmation of everything that has been said under the umbrella of Hell Joseon. Because.. I do a radio-panel show once a week.

JS: okay.

SW: and every time I go there, they say "You are the Hell Joseon guy, so tell us - do you feel vindicated?"

JS: yes, sure!

SW: But I mean, to say I feel vindicated, would imply certain glee. So I wouldn't say that. But it is tragic. Tragic in a way that people who were using the term Hell Joseon were right in many ways about it. So, that is what is so sad about this whole thing..

JS: If you have the political spectrum at all, is it your idea that only the left side would be using this term actively, or do you think more and more people have started to adapt their language and taken this expression into their vocabulary?

SW: Uhm, I don't see conservatives using it. And to be honest, I mean, conservatives have no vested interest in talking about Korea as "Hell", right? They are all about national pride and about positive image of the nation. And that was the whole battle over the history text book controversy, right? It is a question about how we veil the past. Are we going to talk about the economic development as something that has been crushing for the soul of the people, something that really undermined human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and really set back the process of democratization.. or are we going to talk about it something that has really enabled democracy in Korea? That was basically where the dividing line was, between the government and the other textbooks that have been much more popular here in Korea, and have been used by many schools.

JS: Where are we exactly now with the whole textbook.. ?

SW: Looks like it is not really going to happen.

JS: ok.

SW: So there was some talk back in december over whether they were just going to through it out. So it is written.

JS: it is written? And by whom?

SW: Yea so there was a list of authors which was kept secret until December basically, and then the names came out it is the usual people that we had been anticipated.. So in Korea, contemporary history, modern history is a very controversial topic because it speaks directly to the legitimacy of different political factions.

JS: Sure.

SW: The overall issues like collaborations, dictatorship

JS: and national security I suppose?

SW: National security, pro-north korean collaboration, so all these issues comes together..

JS: So it is heavily politicized?

SW: Heavily politicized, which is why even in existing version of history text books, you see very little emphasis on modern and contemporary history, after the founding of the republic basically..

JS: really?

SW: You can check the percentage of how many pages are dedicated to ancient and pre-modern history versus modern and contemporary history. It is remarkable. Normally, in most cases, it would be fifty-fifty.

JS: Yes sure, at least. I mean, it is.. Danish history we don't have that much to talk about before we started developing, so.. I don't know but.. that is interesting. Could be something I should dig into. Besides from the fact that I don't read Korea, but still.. So, if history has been politicized..

SW: Well history is inherently political.

JS: yes but, well it is. But in terms of Hell Joseon, is that also a politicized expression or do you think that some people use it just as I would say "Ah fuck" in a very casual way.. you think it sort of has lost its meaning to some people?

SW: Certainly people use that in that context. But does that mean it is any less political?

JS: yes that is the question.

SW: What is not political?

JS: and who decides whether it is or not?

SW: I mean, for example, my father who is 76, he will not use the term Hell Joseon in any context. There are other ways to say the world is fucked up. Uhm, Hell Joseon really is a very particular expression, with a particular meaning in Korea, which is why you need to be careful in how you bring it up with Koreans. But overall, the ones who use it.. I mean, these are the ones who are really questioning.. like just exactly did South Korea expire to become?

JS: Yes, sure.

SW: like, did we want this festival of capitalist so called democracy? Where actually things run very much according to the same set rules that were established in the Joseon Dynasty. It is about being in the right family, and it still is in Korea. Blood lines are so important, it is about your connections, it is about your network.

JS: So, social capital?

SW: yes yes social capital, your cultural capital, it is a show-off culture, it is about what you wear, about how you look, it is about what car you drive, and what apartment you live in.

JS: yes okay.

SW: and and.. in a society where so much is invested in the idea of status, and how it has become so difficult for people to apply your status based on effort. That is why people are now really questioning. Do they really want to be here? Can we change it? Or should we leave it entirely? So now we have another expression called "Tall Joseon", right? "Tall" means "talchul" - "to escape".

JS: exiting or escaping, okay..

SW: Yes to exit Korea. So that applies for immigrant, going to northern Europe, Scandinavia, right? And frankly, even I am thinking about moving to Germany. Because..

JS: Yea sure, but that would also be because it implies love as well, right? If your boyfriend is.. or is he based in Korea?

SW: He is based in Korea now.

JS: oh okay.

SW: But eventually, he will go back..

JS: yea so still, if you had the choice between living in Germany the next 10 years or living in Korea the next 10 years, what would be the..?

SW: Well, Germany would be peaceful, but I might be bored out of my skull.

JS: sure, and how can you change something from outside?

SW: And in Korea, I mean for better or for worse, I have a measure of influence over the way that certain discourse unfolds and I mean I would like to believe that it can bring about positive change.

JS: yes..

SW: although, as you were saying, can anybody really change the system?

JS: oh, no my point being was that how much can you change it from Germany?

SW: oh right exactly.

JS: You have certain position within Korea, and it is not an accident that I stumbled upon your articles. I mean it is because you are already setting up a certain discourse, and especially in an English-speaking context, to making it more noticeable for us non-Korean speakers.

SW: Yes mainly our goal was basically.. we explore an issue, and a lot of foreign media just pick up on it. So in a way, we are small but somehow we have enabled to really make some things go viral. Hell Joseon is actually a really good example of that.

JS: it is. even Wall Street Journal.. I see in a lot of..

SW: .. and Forbes.. Washington post, and it is really. Yea I mean Korea Exposé is the reason why. So I really wonder if they will be going to renew my visa. But that is a separate issue.

JS: Really?

SW: Yes, because I am here on a residency visa, which need to be renewed periodically.

JS: So you are not a Korean citizen at the moment?

SW: I became Canadian. I lost my Korean passport when I was 20.

JS: .. because you cannot have your double citizenship?

SW: You can not.

JS: and you chose to sort of give up your Korean?

SW: Yes because I was living in Canada at the time, and to me that was my home. But for some reason now I am back here, and it has been a very strange position, because in a way.. yea..

JS: wauw, that is really..

SW: yea but, I am not running Canada Exposé right?

JS: haha yes okay. So they could actually chose not to prolong your..

SW: Well certainly, you know, I wrote about this too. Foreigners are not allowed to be political. And technically it was illegal for foreigners to attend these anti-government rallies in the last weeks..

JS: at Gwanghwamoon?

SW: Yes at Gwanghwamoon or anywhere. It is very specific..

JS: So my presence being around Gwanghwamoon on a Saturday evening..

SW: If it is seen as political participation or expression..

JS: Yes, okay. So there is a difference between holding a camera or holding a great banner or something?

SW: That might be one thing..

JS: .. if you wanted to interpret it..

SW: Yea or whether there were to be a court trial of whether your war chanting logos, or holding up certain signs.

JS: okay..

SW: But in any event, I mean, there are so many foreigners here anyways, so that would not be an issue.

JS: It is pretty difficult to divide people, Gwanghwamoon is already a tourist attraction, right?

SW: But in the immigrant control act it is very specific that foreigners can not engage in political expression or activities, and there is this whole list of things you are not allowed to do under the umbrella of what is political.

JS: and..

SW: .. and writing about politics actually counts as well, but I guess you could make the argument that as a journalist, you are just writing about news. But at the same time, much of what I write is not news. I write opinions.

JS: yes, and you analyse stuff. Not just bringing the word.. well okay..

SW: So in a way, they could theoretically.. yea chose not to renew my visa.

JS: and who is in charge of fixing your visa?

SW: It is the immigration control. immigration.. what is their exact name? The immigration office which refers to the justice ministry, and uhm.. anyway, I am not worried about to, to be honest with you.

JS: well let's see, there must be some kind of change sooner or later, meaning that there will also be a political change of discourse? I suppose. You are not going to elect someone who is more conservative than what you have right now?

SW: Well nobody who is running is really more conservative than Park geun-hye. That is for sure. At least among the main presidential contenders. So that kind of brings us to the next issue right? Post-Hell Joseon. Right?

JS: sure!

SW: If we don't escape Korea, what do we do here? And that has really become the central issue for the elections.. Looking forward. but still, for many of the older voters, that issue of Hell Joseon has not been resonating so much, and they are the ones who vote more than young people in Korea.

JS: and what is the legal age of suffrage in Korea?

SW: It is 19.

JS: ok.

SW: And there is a talk about lowering it to 18, but it is unclear whether it really happens..

JS: just like in Japan?

SW: So in the OECD, I believe is the only country where the voting age is still 19.

JS: yes because to my knowledge they Japan changed it, was it last year?

SW: I think it was recent.

JS: yea well, but it doesn't really matter when only 20% of the young generation actually votes.

SW: Yea so, they are really not going to make an impact. And frankly, it is something that the left has always wanted because they recognize that they get more support from young people. but as you were saying, how much of an impact could it bring?

JS: Sure, you need to mobilize them as well.

SW: So that is something people are not really fighting for at the moment, although there is a discussion about it, but there is also a discussion about constitutional reform.

JS: Yes exactly.

SW: And many other things. And inequality is an issue. it was an issue, when Park geun-hye ran too. But then again, national security remains an important issue too. With Donald Trump coming in later this week, and the issue of US military presence in Korea. And the installation of THAAD and also what policies to assume toward North Korea.

JS: yes.

SW: Is it going to be continuation of the hard-line policy as under Park Geun-hye. So there are many many issues that are.. that will affect the voter sentiment, and it also depends on the geopolitical situation and the economy. Because THAAD is linked to exporting to China, and.. China is linked to the issue of the so-called US, Japan and Korea Trilateral alliance, which is also tied to the issue of comfort women which is tied to anti-Japanese sentiment which is tied to dokdo.. So lots of things going on besides Hell Joseon..

JS: yes.

SW: so, it is just one facet of the political discourse.

JS: And do you think the expression of Hell Joseon could have any.. how can I phrase this. could it serve as a tool in the movement towards something else than now? Do you think it serves the purpose of mobilization or is there any..

SW: .. any moment for improvement?

JS: .. does it change anything? Does it have an impact?

SW: That is the question here right? Because a lot of these terms that generates a buzz, often they are so negative to the point of cringing using, that.. is it really going to inspire people to do something? or is this really more a sign of desperation, despair, hopelessness? I am inclined to see it more as the latter. right? How many people.. that is why "Hell Joseon" lead to "Tall Joseon", Hell Joseon did not lead to.. I don't know.. "Better Joseon" or..

JS: no no exactly..

SW: right? it is the way the language is working, and for example the term that I brought up in the beginning - "hannamchung" - they are talking about the Korean men as parasitic entities, does that really inspire change? it is not "Yes we can".

JS: or does it make men even worse? Because it could also be a self-fulfilling prophesy.

SW: So megalia brought up about a huge backlash in a way.. I mean, I supported many of the things they did. I think they were right to point out this misogyny in South Korea, but, but then I mean, you kind of need to make them see "oh I have been doing something, and let's not do it again", but that is not really how this language work, and how Megalia defended itself is basically by saying "we are using the same language that Korean men use to denigrate women", right? "They talk about us as these useless, wasteful, vein-creatures who only care about finding rich boyfriends and spending money on becoming pretty and then having a nice life without working". So there was that mirroring, that what Megalia called it. But the mirroring..

JS: So an eye for an eye?

SW: Yes, "we treat you the way you treat us". And maybe they did succeed in making some men seeing that there is a problem here. But it certainly did not lead to be changed, I would argue. So, in return there was a huge backlash.

JS: yes okay.

SW: And now.. there was basically this whole Megalia "witch-hunt" last summer.

JS: oh, okay!

SW: That perceived by this one picture on instagram of an actress - voice actress - wearing a t-shirt that had a slogan "girls do not need a prince" and that is phrase that is associated with Megalia. So even though it is a very benign sentiment in my view..

JS: Yes sure.

SW: Right? but the fact that it can be seen as connected to Megalia was enough to bring about huge public storm of controversy and then the gaming company that used her for recording voices of characters in their games basically terminated their relations with her..

JS: because they were afraid of public sentiment?

SW: yea well because a lot of gamers are men..

JS: Yes that is true

SW: .. And the actress tried to make the whole thing go away by saying that it was a mutual decision on ours to part ways and I don't support Megalia etc. but it was a clear sign of how men are responding to. It was just like when this murder happened in Gangnam around the subway station.. i don't know if you..

JS: was it the young man who..

SW: Yes a young man who..

JS: .. killed someone?

SW: .. yes killed someone in a toilet near Gangnam subway station and there was a big memorial at Gangnam station exit 10. A lot of women coming to put post-its with messages of condolence and messages of anger and misogyny.. they were attributing the cause of the murder to misogyny and many men were saying that no he is just a deranged guy but he also gave a.. he also confessed that he hated women - that is why he killed the woman. So there was a..

JS: That is a very grey zone of interpretation I suppose. You can make it into what you.. if you want to use it for your own movement or your own argument, you can always put in into a greater context, right?

SW: Yes, so my argument was at the time, that whether he did it out of misogyny or out of his mental illness, it does not change the fact that we do have misogyny in Korea.

JS: Sure.

SW: huh? and so many men reacting anger against any notion that misogyny could inspire murder is precisely a sign that there is something wrong with this country when it comes to gender equality..

JS: Yes I guess that is true.

SW: But anyway, you don't have to subscribe to my argument. But once again, the point that we were trying to get to was that these terms, they are not inspiring hope.. they are further pointing South Korea into this sense of despair, which is something that I actually.. It is a view that I share with many conservatives..

JS: .. that there is no need to stating the obvious, or?

SW: It is important to criticize issues boldly, so that people recognize the problem as a serious one, but to move from that toward improvement, you need something else than Hell Joseon, and that is what is missing here, in Korea, now. And that is also the failure of the radical feminist who are active online. and where do we go, right?

JS: it is.. to me, following Korean politics, and having read a lot about democratic movements in the 60s 70s and the 80s, it has always struck me how.. it seems that the left wing has had some difficulties in uniting?

SW: I feel that part of it is.. they don't really have an agenda. They don't have a..

JS: .. besides from opposing something?

SW: Yea they don't have a phrase, so they always talk about "we listen to the will of the people" this is something that is partly touched upon..

JS: Yes that is someone I read about this morning!

SW: Yes in a piece that I ran last night.

JS: .. the "Min"-something..

SW: "Minsim", the this idea of the hearts of the people, this has been so important. And when you look at it from the western perspective, it sounds like demagoguery..

JS: Yes sort of?

SW: The idea that you must always abide public sentiment, right? But for the Korean Left it has a much deeper meaning, it is about how elected is really the ones who have the capacity to determine the qualification of the president, of the ruling class, and actually that is a very democratic thing.

JS: well yes actually I kind of like the notion - to some extent - but the problem is if the broader population is not able to articulate the need, then who is going to..

SW: .. and what does it mean to do the right thing? what does it mean to be moral? Was does it mean to have virtue? right.. that is subjective. And that is something the Left really has to come out and articulate, they need to build on the discourse of the "Minsim" and "minjung" which really has developed in the 70s and the 80s in reaction to military dictatorship. But they have really failed to do that, so since then, their favorite line is, whenever there is an election, is that "gongmin" or "minsim" - "gongmin" meaning "citizens" will judge the regime. Right? So they will judge the government, they will judge the saenuri-party.. they always talk about this judgement, moral judgement.. so the sense is that people instinctively recognize that there is something immoral, or something virtueless, in the way that the ruling party, the government have behaved. So they will basically overthrow it, overthrow the regime, and give the mandate to the opposition. This is a very feudal idea, of dynasty transition.

JS: Yes, sort of.

SW: Yes, so on one hand - heaven chooses the next ruler, but the ruler must win the hearts of the people, and then you have revolution, and that is how you justify the establishment of a new dynasty..

JS: of a new dynasty..

SW: In Korean history. Right? it is the whole idea of mandate, it is different from western democracy, that is something that people kind of miss out on. So..

JS: Yes, well, the role of the president, I have always seen it as some sort of oxymoron, the way you perceive your president. Because in one sense, he or she is not supposed to be political, not suppose to have all the power, or the control - and at the same time, you sort of expect them.. now I just say "you", I know I am being very generalizing..

SW: yes yes yes..

JS: .. but you sort of expect them to do the impossible.. this fixating on what did Park Geun-hye do during the sewol ferry accident, and like, from my perspective she is also just a human being..

SW: But presidents must be more.

JS: yes, is that the common notion? Because I don't think..

SW: The king is dead, but long live the king..

JS: I tend to believe in Denmark we wouldn't put the same responsibility on the shoulders of our leaders. But I am not sure. I am just thinking aloud right now, okay?

SW: Well, are you saying that the people of Denmark would not care if, let's say there is a massive train accident, 304 people die, and you find out that while this accident was racing on, and there was a fire and people were burning to death inside, your prime minister was getting cosmetic procedures in her official residence.

JS: In the act of saving the people, I would hope that we do not perceive it as the prime minister's or the president's job to make sure that it happens. I would like to think that we have such a structure, such an institutional implementation of things, that no matter what our prime minister slash president or other political leader is doing, we will still have a well functioning - i don't know - rescue institution.. do you know where I am getting?

SW: Yes because you have trust in the institution of the government..

JS: probably..

SW: But in Korea, there is no trust in the institutional government, which is why the president is so important.

JS: but I like to provoke..

SW: yes yes yes

JS: And this is one of my small poking and being the devil's advocate..

SW: What I find really unfortunate about criticism against Park Geun-hye, is on hand, people says she acts like a queen, right? and then apparently, her mentor, Choi Tae-min, Choi soon-sil's father, even said.. "the prophecy tells us you will be queen one day"

JS: Yes yes yes

SW: Right? "just wait". And people make fun of it. They call her the pocket-book princess, because she always takes notes in her little pocket-book. But at the same time, people want royalty, they want a feudal ruler, they want an absolute ruler who can come in and fix everything. It is the waiting-for-superman complex. A guy I know - john powell - is talking about.. "is Ban Ki-moon South Korea's knight in shining armour, white knight.. so there is

that sense that president must be the savior, and in the same time, they don't like it when the president is actually royal. And that is a very delicate balance.

JS: It is!

SW: On one hand, the kind of things I am criticizing the things with Ban Ki-moon doing.. many people in Korea are calling him, accusing him of doing what they call "Songnim" cosplay", you know what cosplay is?

JS: hmm I know what the concept of cosplay is..

SW: Yes so he is pretending to be a "songnim" - "ordinary person"

JS: oh alright. He has been doing a lot of things lately right?

SW: Because ordinary people go to charity and spoon-feed elderly people, they take subway, and they.. I mean of course politicians do this everywhere, but in Korea it does have a particular significance. But at the same time, the fact that you can do.. you can pretend to be an ordinary person, precisely indicates that you are not ordinary, you are special.

JS: Exactly.

SW: And there is actually a tradition in Korea. You see sometimes in historical dramas a truly benevolent king will dress up like an ordinary person and leave the palace with one bodyguard, and will observe the livelihoods of his subjects, so he can truly learn what there are up to. And when he comes back to his palace, he will start grading his officials saying that, "why didn't you tell me my people are suffering" and "I will announce this policy today" and "there will be no more taxes on poor farmers".

JS: yes yes yes.

SW: Something like that.. right? So you need to be a down to earth ruler, right? that is the fascinating contradiction of South Korean presidency.

JS: Yes it really is. It's.. I think.. It is always a delicate situation to compare nations, but this whole thing about downgrading yourself in a position that makes you equal to the normal people.. in Denmark, I truly believe that most of the politicians they ARE more or less normal people, right?

SW: Yes, and this is something that the Korean's absolutely idealize. Like, when you had your female prime minister, she was bicycling to her office, right? Or am I confusing this with "Borgen" (A danish drama-series about life of politicians)

JS: hmm, no but she is.. she would use to.. she was a little bit posh, so we always "teased" her.. she comes from a under-class society and was raised in a ghetto - as far as I remember - and she always claimed her working-classness, but at the same time she really digged gucci-bags and her accent was very posh, so there was this.. but she did bike, and she did share most features with very "normal" people, as I would say. But we have had politicians who have been even more down to earth.

SW: So like the kind of stories which are really.. because now I follow german politics, because at home my boyfriend is watching german shows.. but somehow I am ending up getting german news before he does, because Korean news would now report on German news even before germany does it. So one example was that Angela Merkel shops at a

supermarket, like everyone else. And yes, she does have a bodyguard, but mainly just to make sure no one is assisting her, and then this reporter from Korea's biggest newspaper, Chosun Ilbo, she went and followed Angela and tried to get an interview on the spot. But Angela said, "I am sorry, but I don't give interviews at the supermarket."

JS: yes, "I am just, today I am just myself"..

SW: yes, "I am here to buy food" but anyway, they still make it a big article in Chosun Ilbo, the biggest daily newspaper in Korea.

JS: and what was the angle? That she did not want to..

SW: No the angle is that chancellor of Germany is shopping at a supermarket, but what does Park geun-hye do?

JS: oh right.. yea we have no idea

SW: uhm she has 4 chefs. Each one specialized in a different cuisine, so there is that comparison. Or when Angela, after she announced her intention to stand for chancellorship once again, there was a christian democratic party conference in Baden-wurttemberg, so she was I think in Stuttgart. So there was a meeting where she was on the podium with other party.. senior party members from the region, and then one party member got of from the audience and said that "Frau Merkel, you should be ashamed of your refugee policy, you need to go" right? So the fact that somebody can just challenge the chancellor like that.. because in Korea the president will not even have press-conferences unless all the reporters have been fed questions beforehand so they can only ask pre-approved questions to the sequence..

JS: Sure.

SW: .. that is determined by the press-office of the blue house, and the president of course has the prepared answers she will.. i don't know..

JS: A speech written by someone else..

SW: Rehearse by beforehand and so on. So that comparison is always made, and that is why, you know, there is this absolute idealization of western european democracy. But at the same time, Koreans don't really allow - and that is the failure of the republic, I would argue - they don't really.. do they really want someone like Angela?

JS: Yes sure, would they get fed up with her.. or would they accept that she did not give an interview in the supermarket?

SW: Or rather they would talk about how she is lacking dignity because will go and shop in supermarket.

JS: Yes, "it is not worthy of a president".

SW: Sure, so there is that contradiction too. Which is why.. of course it is difficult to be a politician anywhere..

JS: Sure.

SW: But in Korea, I feel that that mixture of the pre-modern feudal expectations about what a ruler is supposed to be, and at the same time this very modern democratic notion of what a president is supposed to be, it is really merged into the office of presidency. Which is why the criticism is that presidencies are too imperial. And it is a valid criticism, I would argue. But unfortunately, do people really want to change that? Even though they criticize it? I think the left really just criticizes it because they don't have the presidency at the moment.

JS: Well probably. Because when they get in power, then they also have the means to actually achieve what they want to achieve, right. and if they..

SW: Yes for example, this ridiculous, what I call service announcement or advertisement they run everywhere in Korea, on TV, on Radio, on digital billboards downtown, that's all paid for by the government. And that was the doing of the very liberal president Ro moohyun.

JS: Really?

SW: Yes, who decided that the main print media, Chosun, Chung-ang Dong-A were too against him because they are conservative. So now he would use state-budget to promote his policies.

JS: Wow, that's..

SW: And get around the conservative control over the media.

JS: yes, that's very smart.

SW: Yes and now it is being used by Park Geun-hye to tell her proposed labour reform and how we need to make it easier to fire people and increase irregular employment and all that. So, it can certainly backfire. So left certainly enjoy the imperial presidency when they have it, but they are not interested in really meaningful political reform.

JS: Okay.

SW: Now there is this talk of constitutional reform only because.. basically the main guy, right, Moon Jae-In is one person, right, the front-runner, who is the only one who is currently not in favor of constitutional reform. Because he has so much to lose.

JS: yes, he is almost reaching the..

SW: yes, almost there.. And then, everybody else, including Ban Ki-moon, is talking about constitutional reform because they realize that only though constitutional reform they still might be able to exercise some power, even when they don't get to be president.

JS: Yes. I heard the mayor of Seoul, Park won sun, he talked about making Chongwadae into a museum and moving the whole political organs and everything, just restructuring everything, because he thought there was a rotten culture inside the..

SW: Yea yea but his argument reflects something besides that. It is also about the centralization of power, and money in Seoul. Even though he is the mayor of Seoul, the long-running criticism of the left is that, you know, Seoul has been the capital for too long. Since the Joseon dynasty..

JS: Sure.

SW: And that is why we have this strange invention called the administrative capital in Sejong city, where nobody really wants to live.

JS: Really? I've never heard about that.

SW: Yes, that is the second capital.

JS: Okay!

SW: Two hours outside from Seoul. So, Ro Moo-hyun wanted to move the capital down there, but of course he could not overcome the opposition of capital-based elites.

JS: Yes.

SW: You know, as therefore he created an administrative capital. Technical Prime Minister's main office is in Sejong City, not in Seoul. But his main residence is in Seoul. In near Bukchon, east of gyeongbokgung palace.

JS: Yes that's very close to cheongwadae.

SW: So I think he needs to fly there by helicopter..

JS: okay well that's just ironic on a whole nother level..

SW: And then he has a second office in the government complex just south of the gyeongbok palace.

JS: so left from Gwanghwamun?

SW: Yes right, on the left side. And the right is the museum of modern and contemporary history. So that is why we have this weird structure. And on the meanwhile, a lot of the Government complexes used to be based in the city of "..kuatjon" just south of Seoul. And that is being dismantled because they need to move more people down to Sejong, and this has become a very expensive endeavour. But anyway, it was started and now it is still going on, and it is not even Park won-sun who is talking about this. Another contender, Ahn Hee-jong, he is the governor of the province of either Chungbuk or Chungnam, I always mix it up, one of the Chungcheong provinces, where Sejong is actually. He is also calling on decentralizing power and moving to more regional governance. A kin to the model in Germany, basically.

JS: yes sure.

SW: And I feel that this is.. Personally, now we are so far away from Hell Joseon, but this is something to consider, because when you look at countries like France, which is very similar to Korea in its political model. With capital-center..

JS: Yes and presidencies..

SW: Governance and imperial presidency, and they are also talking about constitutional reform. Thus bringing in the 6th republic, is it? Now they are in the 5th republic.

JS: oh yes that's true.

SW: So that talk is going on, and meanwhile you travel around the french countryside and you can really see how much the provinces are suffering. under the current economic arrangement.

JS: hm yes that is also why you have the rising right-wings. The whole Le Pen..

SW: .. yes you go to Province which is the main, the heartland of Front National and you talk to people and they say, "it looks beautiful now in July, with lots of people, try coming back in February".

JS: Yes. Then let's see how grey and dark it is..

SW: .. And when the unemployment rate goes up to 40% because all the jobs are seasonal there.

JS: oh yea, okay.

SW: And all the vacationers, even the ones who have homes, they don't want to be there in January February. So there is a talk about that. And Korea is absolutely the same. When you travel the countryside there is abject poverty, which people like me, do not appreciate. Because I was born in Seoul, I grew up in Seoul, I live in Seoul, my parents are in Seoul, all my relatives are in Seoul, and we are the beneficiaries of what South Korea has become. And personally, I should have no problem with it. But it is not good for many other people.

JS: Right. And in the end, it will actually end up biting you in the.. if you do not think more about the whole picture. If you are content with your situation and not thinking about what is happening in the other regions, at some point it will come back and haunt you, right?

SW: Yes so, so one of the books that is really making a wave right now, I forget the exact title, but my friend was reading it, it is something like "the culture of the banlieue", or "beyond the periphery" or something like that, and basically it is about how, you know, it is so close from Paris, but it is so far away.

JS: Yes, a whole nother mindset, it is really staggering when you go out there.

SW: Especially talking to the so called "Le Parisienne" and I was telling them when I first moved that maybe I'll look for my apartment east from the.. and they were like "oh, mon dieu" right? If you go there I would never visit you..

JS: Because it is so unthinkable to put your feet there, or?

SW: Yes it is a joke but, in Korea we often say that "some jokes have bone". There is a grain of truth.

JS: Yes well that goes with many stereotypes too..

SW: So they were saying "we only travel through the periphery for certain reasons", right? To go to the Versaille, to go the Airport or go to Disneyland.

JS: Ah yes that sounds true. But aren't there any de-urbanization movements, slow life.. sometimes I see these things in Korea. People moving out of the bigger city, moving out of Seoul, trying to find their roots..

SW: Yes, so the population of Seoul has actually been falling. As you know. It is kinda hovering around 10 million, but there has been some decrease, I don't know, it might have gone up again. But then again, Gyeonggi-do is growing, it is the satellite cities. It is not really such a significant movement of people, but culturally there is an idea of wanting to leave all this rat-race behind.

JS: yes yes yes.

SW: So, you can see that in this movement that has been around, since basically the IMF crisis, the Asian Financial Crisis,

JS: Yes so since 1997..

SW: Yes 1997/98 because a lot of people pushed into early retirement, and there is no pension, but you get a lump sum of retirement package, so what do you do with the money? You set up a fried chicken joint, and maybe watch it fail after three years. Or maybe you try to be close to nature, once again.

JS: yes.

SW: so we call it the "Kwino" movement, return to farming movement, and many people tried that, and many people fail, because they have no experience farming.

JS: Yes I can imagine that.

SW: But now there seems to be a better support network. I don't exactly know the numbers, and I really wonder how critical this movement is. And then you can also find communes around the country, where like minded urbaners go down. And they try to found villages together. Because they realize that mentally, psychologically, they are just too different from the real country-side people, so it is too difficult for them to embed themselves in real rural villages.

JS: So instead of integrating, they are sort of segregating themselves

SW: Creating new ghettos. Urban ghettos in the countryside, with nice houses, or some of them looking like "Hannok", the traditional houses.

JS: So that would be the privileged parts of those..

SW: Yes, and then you have the leftist activists, who go down and actually try to create real agricultural communes. So these do exist. And it is not my main research interest, but there is a professor who works on this, if you look up "Mari ho hang", she works on this, she's actually a North Korea expert but she has recently become interested in this topic, that is why she told me when we had coffee together two months ago, she might actually be here right now, because it is her research year. And she told me she was going to be in Korea in January, she was going to be spending some time here, so you can email her.

JS: Sure.

SW: Maybe you will be able to go down there and visit.

JS: Could be interesting, just to see some of the solutions. You mentioned one solution is just to move abroad, right? But internal movements are also..

SW: Yes and then young people who are opting into living in small cities, but then again, they are trying to - in many ways - maintain their urban lifestyle, so they set up their cafés, in these old factories in Kunsan, the former industrial port city, or galleries, you know, hipster-joints..

JS: Yes I can easily imagine.

SW: Crafted beer, and there is domestic tourism in Korea. And there are organizers interested in visiting it, but it is not really so much.. I really wonder what the numbers are like. But in many ways I find what is happening in Korea very much reflects what happened in Japan in the last 10 years too. There are so many similarities.

JS: Sure.

SW: The falling birth rate, the difficulty of marriage, the what has been termed the decreasing interest in the act of dating, or sex itself.

JS: Sure.

SW: And meanwhile this interest in digital relationships over real physical human relationships.. and then.. what else can we say? hm the decreasing interest in corporate sector, corporate jobs, the rat race, conventional models of success..

JS: What about environmental concerns?

SW: So in terms of environmental concerns, yearning for something other than the urban lifestyle than they have seen. But also being in Seoul, not wanting to duplicate the lifestyle of their parents, like what they have seen with these uhm.. wanting to live in these big apartments.. so one of our media partners up here, they are actually interested in this demographic. They call them the "yuppies who want to live in mapo-district"

JS: Okay.

SW: Right, because "Mapo" is where "Sincheon" is, but.. or "Hongdae", but they don't really want to be in "Hongdae" per say, but there are smaller neighborhoods that are surrounding "Sincheon" and "Hongdae" where you have these cute cafés and galleries, and little boutiques and little french restaurants run by a guy who used to be in marketing and then got fed up and then went to study cooking at Le Cordon Bleu for - i don't know - three years, and came back and opened up a french homestyle restaurant or something like that. Right, so there is this keen interest in this.

JS: So what is this, escapism, or?

SW: Yes wanting to have pets, and take walks down Hangang river, so that kind of lifestyle. But can we really call that "tal-joseon" or escape? It is more.. I see it more kind of trying to create a haven for yourself, within hell.

JS: Yes exactly, it is sort of keeping other people out your own..

SW: Yes, and also these people are privileged people, they need to have the money to have this lifestyle.

JS: Yes, sure!

SW: They love scandinavian design, and they travel. uhm, I travel a lot too. But whenever I travel, and I see, you know, I am not the only one. I certainly do not want to present myself as somebody who is kind of removed from this.. I am here, and I am part of what is happening. And although I do have some distance from it. And the kind of people I just described to you, a lot of them are my friends.

JS: Yes, and can you blame them for doing it? If you have the means, the tools, and the imagination, then why not? Or do you have an obligation to sort of drag everyone else out with you?

SW: Yes, and the last thing I want to say is.. then the question is, who are the ones really fighting? And there are the activist, of course. But the whole notion of activism has always been so compromised in Korea, I would argue. It is hard to translate it, even. Activist, you could call that person "Hualdongga", that is the term they prefer. So, "hualdong" is literally "activity", and "hualdongga" is an activist. But some people might say "undongga"..

JS: That is movement, right?

SW: Yes movement, proponent. So there is this sense that someone who espouses a cause, is someone to be viewed with skepticism.

JS: Yes.

SW: Because you do not really know what their agenda is, what they are trying to do here. And I see a lot of people who are committed to causes, and trying to do the right thing, whatever that means, but it is such a minority, and not to mention that financially, it is almost impossible to live like that without social welfare. So many of them have told me that they either live abject poverty, or they need to be married to someone who has a real job.

JS: Okay, so they can continue their activity without thinking..

SW: Yes, so one guy that I know works for an NGO that monitors Korean transnational corporations and how they behave, whether they are abusing labour forces, whether they are degrading the environment, and he told me the ideal relationship in this business is activist with a pharmacist, something like that. Because pharmacists tend to have a stable income, and so try to marry a pharmacist with kind of an idealistic..

JS: yes yes yes.

SW: huh? Because they want to compensate for their guilt of not doing anything.

JS: ah, sure.

SW: By paying for your activism, and you can go out there and do the things that need to be done.

JS: Alright, that is really interesting in itself, this whole constellation.

SW: So these are the ones, maybe trying to do things. And then you have the political movements, of course. But genuine progressive parties are.. you know..

JS: They are also prohibited, right?

SW: No, it is like uhm.. of course you cannot be pro North Korea in any way, it is against national security law, but just trying to kind of espouse the causes that are truly seen as progressive in other contexts. There are basically only really two parties, Justice Party and Green Party. And Justice Party now have, what, 4 seats in national assembly? Green Party has no seats in national assembly, and that is the reality of progressive politics.

JS: Yes. So even those who would be labeled in Korea as progressive, might not be it in more wider perspective? Or how can you explain it?

SW: It is a lot about, in my opinion, preserving their current privileges. Like unions are important, and I believe in Unions, I support them, but South Korean unions also fail miserably when it comes to helping those who are in irregular employment.

JS: Sure.

SW: Yes, because it has basically become a representative organization for people already in regular employment to negotiate with companies. So to be in regular employment, it means a lot. And this is also something that Korea shares a lot in common with France.

JS: Yes yes. And they are trying to deregulate it right now.

SW: And the question about whether you are on the "durée il-limitée or limitée", that is such a big thing, even when it comes to rent one apartment.

JS: That's true.

SW: And also when it comes to borrowing money from the bank. In Korea, when it comes to borrowing money, being able to buy apartment, it is the same thing. You need to really have regular employment, or you need to have family money that you can use..

JS: Yes.. but Korean structure of unions are company based, right? Or are they industry.. how does it work?

SW: They are both.

JS: Okay, but you have union just for Hyundai, right?

SW: uhm no. There is the metal workers union, which is one of the biggest and most powerful and militant unions, and they have chapters in different companies. But also there are other unions that can have chapters in the same company, representing different workers. And then you have some companies, there might be a union. But the union must have the means, the power to fight the company, which of course never wants unionization. So, actually you have industry-wide unions, but to know more about this you really need to look at work from basically one scholar named Jamie Doucette.

JS: Okay cool, I can go back and..

SW: He is at university of Manchester, and he is the expert of unionization in Korea. Another person is Jennifer Chun, C-H-U-N, that is her last name, and she works on the precariousness of labour in Korea. So that is another scholar you need to look at if you are serious about researching this topic.

JS: Well, it is always interesting going into details with these things. One of my lectures during this two-week course at SNU is about undocumented migrant workers and their rights to unionize or just join unions, which was..

SW: .. Recently approved!

JS: exactly, but my concern has always been that. Aren't they sort of mis-crediting themselves, by gaining the rights of normal labour.. Then was is the incentive for the

conglomerates to actually employ them? By making their rights equal to a normal Korea worker, then why would you as a company hire undocumented workers?

SW: There is one argument that I can make, which is "Koreans does not want to do it".

JS: Okay.. is that the.. hm..

SW: I mean, the conditions that migrant workers suffer, are so bad. Of course the standard they were hoping to get - what is equal to that of a regular employee in Korea - but even for them to enjoy the rights of irregular employees in Korea would be a huge victory for them. So I would say there is still incentive.

JS: Okay, good good! Because I was a little bit worried that they were moving towards something that could demonize them in the end.

SW: Well, that is actually the demonization they are already dealing with. Because in Korea, oddly enough, it is the left that is anti-migrant workers.

JS: Sure.

SW: Conservatives want migrant workers. And then if you talk to those on the left, they would say "migration is employed by the companies to further impoverish Koreans".

JS: Like the race to the bottom..

SW: By bringing in cheap labour.

JS: And that is actually the same thing in Denmark. and that is the only matter where the very left and the very right are sort of connecting or binding, because the far right has one reason for not wanting migrants in, due to all the stereotypes of violence and harassment, but on the left hand you have the social dumping phenomena for a reason not to let in migrant workers, they sort of ruining our attempt to negotiate higher salaries and so on. So they are sort of joining forces.

SW: So you do see that, I think, perhaps in Korea one day, but for now, what I have seen from the conservative side is that they are pro migrant labour, as long as migrant labour remains cheap and highly exploitable, but at the same time. If you look around Korea, I begin to see more and more migrant workers doing kind of jobs I never thought migrant workers would do. For example, my favorite fried chicken store in "Hanang-dong", uhm. I see a guy who is clearly from South Asia, managing the frier. I had never seen that until now. So.

JS: And that is a progress?

SW: Well I am not saying it is progress.

JS: But an development?

SW: But it means that, it is hard for them to hire. I mean, I wonder how many who actually wants to be managing the friers, and fried chicken joints. And that is where we go back to the issue of young people, and the issue of what is called the "NEET" population, how you heard of that?

JS: uhm perhaps, partly.

SW: So it stands for "Not in employment, education or training" - so N-E-E-T. NEET. So Mexico and Korea are the two countries in the OECD that have the highest NEET populations, or percentage of young people, and that is also.. I don't know how to interpret that..

JS: But there is at least something to..

SW: But it is a sign of certainly giving up..

JS: Yes that is true.

SW: And we have such a highly educated population, everybody would love to remind? (unclear what it said) South Koreans, so then so then why are all these educated people suddenly opting out of education? Out of employment, out of training. And staying at home basically?

JS: Well, seems like South Korea and Mexico has a lot of things.. maybe not a LOT, but economic wise, you also the two countries in the OECD working the most, working-hour wise.

SW: Yes that is also something we have in common. Also high rates of industrial fatality, that is something else they two countries share, I have found.

JS: Okay.

SW: So you could also do comparison with Mexico, comparisons with France, but certainly this is a place with many problems. I don't think that is in dispute. And what have been gratifying to see in the last several months and the year, is just how many of these problems have become really exposed, in the international media. That Korea is uhhh. Yea people recognize that.. because I see so many young foreigners like you, coming to Korea.. Not just to study, or to do workshops. but to work. They really think this is a wonderful place to be, and it can be a wonderful place, if you have money.

JS: That is exactly my saying.

SW: Just like any country, to be honest..

JS: Yes..

SW: .. but it is not necessarily a country that is better than others, there are some serious problems that need to be addressed, and I find that these problems are often overlooked or have been overlooked, until now.. Which was partly why Korean Exposé was created to EXPOSE..

JS: Sure, haha..

SW: .. the problems, and at least to try and start a conversation about it.

JS: Yes..

SW: And one of them was Hell Joseon, to bring the conversation back to the beginning. I don't know if this was helpful?

JS: It's been very helpful, and it's been 1 hour and 24 minutes of very intense talking.

8.4 Appendix 4: Interview with Hyo-jung (Without recording)

Date: 24th January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Hyo-jung. Initials: HJ

Information about Hyo-jung

- Female, born in 1990
- Considers herself belonging to the middle-class
- Almost graduate in political science from Seoul National University
- Starting job as governmental official of rank 5 in Seoul in May 2017.

JS: What is Hell Joseon?

HJ: It is a word used by people in their 20s to express their dissatisfaction with life and their pessimistic view on the future of South Korea.

JS: Have you experienced teenagers or people in their 40s or 50s using the expression?

HJ:

- Do not know about teenagers, but people in their 40s and 50s would never use the expression. They

would feel offended.

- When comparing our life to the life of our parents, they can't understand why we would call it "hell Joseon" since they had a much tougher upbringing than us. They sacrificed themselves for the country, by thinking more about the future of the country than themselves. Today they would feel like the young generation is being spoiled and complaining while we just sit a Starbucks and hang out with friends.

- You know, Korea went through a rapid economic development, and my mom usually tells me about

how she had to skip meals for example when she was younger.

- My parents are really conservative, and they are also pretty nationalistic – they would never say something against their country.

- Heard of the expression first time 2-3 years ago while chatting with a guy online, that wrote it. Did not know about the Hell Joseon before, but could almost figure out what he meant. Explained that it was a slang coming from gaming culture – and then it spread to the wider youth.

- Using the expression every time gathering with friends, almost always someone bringing it up.

- Mostly related to problems with finding jobs and unemployment – but also used when discussing politics.

- Would not really use the expression publicly on social media, as parents/coworkers/employees could see it.
- Haven't seen it used in Korean TV or newspapers either (maybe one time, while someone was explaining the expression from an analytical level)
- Widely used in university and on campus – even those at Seoul National University are having a tough time.

JS: Can you give an example of Hell Joseon?

HJ: My female friend, same age as me, graduated from Hanyang University (a high ranked university in Seoul) on a scholarship and with really high grades. She spent almost 3 years to find a job, and did a lot of different preparation to find a job.

JS: What kind of preparation?

HJ:

- Taking English TOIEC exam, preparing for the examinations that private companies are using as recruitment tools, taking part in several big competitions held by big companies.
- Now she has a job, but it is in a low-status company and with long working hours.

JS: Do you personally think Korea is “Hell Joseon”?

HJ:

- No not really, I am more secure than most others with a good position in the government. They can't fire me, and I get good benefits. I think my job is better than working in unsecure private company. And I take a great pride in working for the state, helping it to prosper.
- Also, Korea is not really “Hell” since we eat well, have nice clothes and still can go out and so on. Of course we have a different life than our parents.
- But, have you ever heard about the golden spoon and the dirt spoon? (using the Korean expressions as well). These terms are even younger – maybe just half/whole year. Very recent.
 - o We used to have an old expression of people being born with a golden spoon in their mouth if they were really successful – well, today we kind of have the same idea. And the dirt spoons are all them that was born with nothing.
 - o Dirt spoon and gold spoon is more new than Hell Joseon as expression – and they are closely related.
 - o Maybe 20 years ago, you could be rich and successful if you worked hard, took an education and did well – today it's more about what kind of background your family has.
 - o Of course, we also have people “in between” like silver and bronze spoon, but the divide between golden spoon and dirt spoon is becoming bigger.

- There is a reason why we have another expression – “Escape Joseon” (find this expression in Korean) – this is what we all strive to, and call people who make it abroad.

JS: Do you think people born with gold spoon would say “hell Joseon” as well?

HJ: I am not sure. Maybe they would, just to be sure that they don’t fall outside of the masses. Because everyone would know they are born with gold spoon, and maybe be mad at them.

JS: What will you be doing as a 5th ranked government official?

HJ:- I don’t know, probably go after coffee and lunch, and print copies.

- For at least the first 2-3 months. It’s like that for most new employees. Then maybe I will move on to do real assignments

JS: Don’t you have a job description?

HJ: No, it’s not like that in Korea. We work in one division for a couple of years, and then we can move on. I will start in environment, and then maybe move on to labour.

JS: So, how would you feel about having a child in Korea?

HJ: Personally, I would not really like to raise a kid in Korea, and it would be very difficult for me as well, both as female and because of normal working conditions. I can expect work until 2am some days, so very long working hours. Taking a day off or leaving early because of your kid is not considered a legitimate excuse of absence.

JS: What would happen if you left your job early?

- I can’t. I would not be fired, but my coworkers would be mad at me, keep me out, accuse me of being selfish for leaving early and giving the others even more work to do.

- It would also be difficult to get a promotion, and I would get a low score in my job evaluation.

JS: Why do you think it has become normal to work so long in Korea?

HJ:

- It dates back to when Korea was still a developing country. We had very few natural resources, so human resources were the main driver of our progress. Back then, people sacrificed their life for making a better future for the next generation, and that’s why they had to work so long time. For some reason, they still believe we can achieve more progress if we keep working as long as we used to do.

- The people who are managers and CEOs today used to work a lot when they first started on the labour market, so they expect us to do the same. It has become normal in Korea.

JS: Are you sure, that your parents don’t understand your perception of Korea as Hell Joseon?

HJ:

- Well, pretty sure. My mom would never understand it. She thinks we have a great future because we managed to go to college and find a job.

- But recently, it seems like my dad became aware of our situation. I explained him about my girlfriend's situation, and since he also graduated from Hanyang University – just 30 years ago – he was really surprised that she had to go three years without finding a job. And he was also surprised when he found out, that the job she got was in a “unknown” company, that he had never heard about before. I guess he thought it would be a piece of cake to find a job with an education from Hanyang, just like when he graduated long time ago. Now he seems to better understand why we complain.

- In general, there are just too many university students in Korea. Maybe 80 percent of all high school students proceed to university.

JS: What are the effects of using an expression such as hell Joseon and gold/dirt spoon?

HJ:

- It could be a sign that our younger generation want something different than our parents.

- I feel like there is a shift in our demands for a good life. We think more about our happiness right here and now, compared to our parent's generation that was thinking about making the future better. It's almost like the expression “yolo”, do you know that

- We want to live our lives now, spend more time free and do what we want. That would be better for our society.

- At the same time, it also results in a clash with our parent's generation, since they have another perception than us.

8.5 Appendix 5: Interview with Dan-oh

Date: 24th January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Danoh. Initials: DO

DO: So uhm, the reason why I did not really focus on the word "Hell Joseon" was because I thought the bottom line is, fundamentally, it is a matter of inequality.

JS: Yes.

DO: So, I was.. that is why I asked you, "so what are the specific questions?"

JS: Yes sure. But let me.. from an academic background, I come from communication studies before starting my Asian Studies

DO: Ah really?

JS: So I am really interested in rhetorical tools and words as a social construction and the implications of different articulations, from a very social constructivist point of view. Which is sort of being distorted by Donald trump these days and what is right and what is wrong? But still.. I kind of sense that by articulating your own situation you can sort of change it.

DO: Oh yes yes, I agree.

JS: And at the same time, your articulations are also a result of your situation.. it is sort of reciprocal. So that is why I am interested in the expression per se, and also the implications behind it. But just as a starting point. So I am also trying to trace back the origins of the word, although it is almost more or less impossible, right? But to sort of get a time span of when you heard about the expression the first time, and where, and in what context, and all these contextual..

DO: Yup got it. I don't know exactly when I heard that word first..

JS: No.

DO: But uhm, I have to tell you this.. My case is maybe a little bit different, because I lived in the united states for three years, and attended college there, and came back. So it is kind of a like, so Korean students who attend just regular university, they just.. they have this hard pressure, since freshman.. Like "oh will I ever get a job" and "how am I going to handle this living expense, especially in Seoul and everything", but I just left whatever.. luckily!

JS: Okay, so when did you come back from the states then?

DO: 2010, at the end of 2010. And then, for 2 years I was just.. singing in a band

JS: Oh nice!

DO: But later, I decided to get a job here in Korea. Before that, I didn't really imagine getting a job here in Korea, it was not my thing. But anyway, the time has come, and I have to get a job, and my hometown is Daegu.

JS: Yes.

DO: But, you know, especially those who are living outside of Seoul have tremendous discrimination against getting a job..

JS: Against Seoul citizens?

DO: Yes, that's.. I think that is the most important factor in regarding discrimination and inequality, because we lack so much of information. Like job market, like those who are fast in getting information, those are ahead, but living in Daegu and getting those kind of informations is not really easy.

JS: Okay, is it also a question of networking?

DO: Yes..

JS: Like, just knowing people, or..

DO: Yes, exactly. That's why students.. high school students want to apply for college in Seoul, because of exactly those networks. But I did not really wanted to, and I have always wanted to "Tal Joseon", you know what I am saying, right?

JS: "Escape Joseon"

DO: Yes since I was a very little child. Because living in Korea is not really. Even when I was 10, it wasn't really fun.

JS: For what reason? If you remember back?

DO: So, me.. since I was 13 I wanted to become a journalist, but here, becoming a journalist is not like making my portfolio from the bottom and everything. No, you go to a good college, and good education and network, and you have this writing test, like an interview, and that's it. You are gonna get to "Choson Ilbo" or "Hankyoreh", like major news organizations, and that is pretty much that.. That's gonna decide your career.

JS: Okay.

DO: So it is hierarchy.

JS: Does it take a university degree in Korea to become a journalist?

DO: Uhm, what do you mean?

JS: Do you study journalism at a university in Korea?

DO: Yes, yes. I did, mass communication and journalism. But uhm, still.. Lack of information and lack of network.. So the reason why I thought this is "Hell Joseon", really "Hell Joseon" is.. uhm. There is one word in Korean "One Shot Society". If you fail once, you are done. So, that's why..

JS: Okay, "one chance society?"

DO: Yes, one chance. I think "one shot society", Wall Street Journal or something they call Korea one shot society or something.

JS: Yes yes

DO: So, I completely agree with that. If you fail once, you are a loser.

JS: And there is no way to..

DO: Exactly. I think society, who can accept.. which has good resilience, like good tolerance for people who can fail, and keep trying, that is why people thrive, right?

JS: Yes exactly.

DO: But here, it is all decided. So, "Hell Joseon" especially, that's, we call it "*geumsujeo*" and *hooksija*", right?

JS: hm, golden spoon and the dirt spoon.

DO: Yes, right? because money matters - more and more. So, pretty much that is how I perceive the word "Hell Joseon", and I think Korea is Hell Joseon..

JS: But did you hear the expression before you went abroad?

DO: Not really.

JS: Okay, but did you have the notion, without having the explicit articulation or?

DO: Yes, yes I did.

JS: Okay, so the first time you encountered it was back here in Korea?

DO: Have I ever visited Korea?

JS: No no, the first time you heard of the expression. Sorry I keep digging in it, because..

DO: Good to see.. and yea I was here in Korea.

JS: This thing about one shot society.. besides from "becoming a failure" if you do it once, what are the other implications of knowing that you live in a one chance society? If you could just put a few words to it. How it sort of shapes you as human being? By putting large words into it..

DO: So, other.. you mean other.. my cases? Other cases?

JS: No not necessarily you personally, but what do you think it means for kids who grow up in a society knowing that "if I fail once, I will always be a failure"? Does that.. affect society in a certain way?

DO: Yes I think so. That is the biggest problem here.

JS: But how?

DO: It is going to keep discouraging people. So let me say, I am a highschool student, I am living in Daegu, and my parents don't have really much money, and if I am in that kind of specific situation, I am not going to see much hope. I am going to succeed in the future? No. That is why I have read several research that says like "do you see your future positively?" More than 80 percent of the students said no. That is how a "one shot society" discourages its students. And that is gonna.. like a vicious circle.

JS: Yes, yes sure.

DO: So I was saying that, in my case, journalism. So in America, you go to a local newspaper organization and you build your portfolio and you are gonna, gonna be credited by major major and upper news organizations, but here, you just have to do well in this one test. And that is going to be decided in your college education, and your network..

JS: Okay.

DO: It is not really.. they ask you "like write down how many people do you know, how many people in power do you know?" they don't ask. But all of the network, it builds that person. So for example my.. maybe my father is doctor. And living with doctor dad for about 20 years, it is gonna build that person differently, and it is a privilege in the beginning.

JS: Yes.

DO: And that is gonna be showed on the writing too, right? I think that's is more about like, economic inequality affects social inequality and any other aspects or so. That's why this is "Hell Joseon".

JS: But, when you compare Korea on socio-economic inequality to the States? I mean, in my perspective, there may not be that big of a difference? Coming from Denmark.. So I find it interesting that you keep talking about these very different opportunities in the States contra.. because to my knowledge, one of the biggest issues in the States these days is also a rising inequality, right? And social mobility.

DO: Yes that's right.

JS: So, I don't know, if you can try putting that into perspective. If there is something else than just.. like one thing is being born into a wealthy family or a poor family, another thing is taking advantage of it and making it.. you know where I am trying to..?

DO: Yes, yes. What I see is that uhm, the United States is not really. Does not really judge people by one chance.

JS: Okay.

DO: So if you try really hard, and if people think like "that person tried enough" or "we have to give him a credit", they do.. but here, I think it is more of a.. really like a Joseon era..

JS: Okay, so the old Kingdom Joseon?

DO: Yes, people perceive other people based on their background. More than Americans do to other people.

JS: Yes, okay. So, I rather not put words to your mouth. But there is something more than just these socio-economic structures? There is also something else?

DO: Yes.

JS: Possibly something cultural? I know.. this may be a leading question, but you just mentioned that something from the Joseon suddenly becomes prevalent in a modern Korea?

DO: Yes, if you want to really distinguish Korean inequality from American inequality..

JS: Exactly.

DO: I think it is more of a cultural problem.

JS: Okay, that is very interesting. Because I never really thought about it in that way. Besides. Korea has always been mentioned in the textbooks as one of those countries rising economically WITH equality.. like, look at Joseph Stiglitz and..

DO: Yes..

JS: .. And a lot of those well acknowledged economist, they always talk about the "miracle of the Han River", "Economic growth with equity" and everything was just so text-book..

DO: Yes..

JS: But I guess something has changed..

DO: Yea but that is true though. As you know.

JS: Yes well you can' really argue with the facts, like.. take the GINI index and a lot of different measurements, I think you truly did achieve some sort of economic development with high levels of equality.

DO: So from among the people you have interviewed so far, were there anyone who said like "oh this is not really like hell"?

JS: I have met one so far who said that "personally, it is not hell for myself, but I do recognize the feeling of Hell Joseon from other people", and I suppose the person also respected the concept of Hell Joseon, right? But what I keep hearing is the discrepancy between the younger and the older generation. So far, I haven't been interviewing anyone let's say in their 40s or 50s, mainly been interviewing the younger generation. I did talk with one women in the age of 55, she said she did not use the expression herself, but she kind of understood that her daughter did. I think the discrepancy is mostly outspoken between the younger and the older generation. But.. I am sort of limited due to the fact that I cannot interview that many older people, since I haven't met anyone speaking english yet.

DO: hm, yea.. Older people, I assume that, they do not want to believe that this is Hell Joseon, because they build this country, they believe. Actually today's newspaper, I don't know if it was Choson Ilbo or Hankyoreh, but the elder people they don't really like the word.

JS: Oh, so there was something in the newspaper today about that?

DO: Yea, I think so.

JS: Okay, I will try to find it. As good as I can. may be relevant. So they don't like it because? Is it disgraceful or?

DO: Yes, yes. And uhm, they think like "oh we dragged this much, and we build our lives like this, but you just sat there and complained about things, and that is not right". So that's why they don't like the word Hell Joseon. But actually, a couple of years ago, I did not like the word either. I am still a believer, that if you try hard enough, you are going to achieve something.

JS: Yes.

DO: But uhm, so for example.. for two years, I tried to become a journalist, and prepared all those kind of exams, but uhm.. So before that interview, we make this kind of study groups. We practice, right? Like I am gonna be the interviewer.. I am the recruiter, so that kind of job interview simulation.

JS: And do you do that amongst other people who wants to apply for the same position?

DO: Yes, yes. So for example, I am applying for KBS, and I passed the writing test, and my final gate is the interview. So, we uhm.. on a online cafe, like other people.. let's prepare this interview, because everybody is pretty desperate to do that. Because all are rivals, but they are gathered too..

JS: "But at the same time we share our common desperation"?

DO: Yes exactly. I have done that several times. And I have seen these amazing people who are still unemployed and I couldn't believe like "why these people are not employed so far?" That is why.. I think that is when I really started to understand why we call it "Hell Joseon".

JS: Yes, sure. That is a really logical explanation.. you have to see it with your own eyes before you.. same thing for me, I mean, coming as an outsider, as a foreigner or whatever, so much about Korea seems so appealing. Right? I keep coming back because everything is.. for the record I do have a Korean girlfriend, but we are living in Denmark, so..

DO: Oh really?

JS: So, she kind of escaped, right?

DO: hahaha

JS: Or is struggling..

DO: Wauw

JS: But I mean, it really took some time for me as well to not just ridicule the expression and saying "well aren't you just being a little over sensitive or.."look at all you have hear, which I don't have in Scandinavia. Cheap food, and good bars, and so much.. like a vibrant society and people on the streets", right? But. yes.. I guess it really.. You have to tried it before you sort of get the notion of it.

JS: But do you think it is a politicized expression, or is it something you can agree on - on both sides of the..? (political spectrum)

DO: Of course it is political. Politicized word. But not really.. but it is not really gonna solve anything.

JS: No?

DO: What I see is every word is political.

JS: Well sure, everything is within a discourse..

DO: Yea sure, so especially here in Korea, for those, who raise their voice, we call them "bbalgangi", right?

JS: hm, I haven't heard about that.

DO: "The red"

JS: I have heard about that!

DO: Partizans.. yea.. So uhm, I think the oppressed voice is like exploded now, and I think that in the beginning, Hell Joseon was among them, the word. I think we have to make more words..

JS: Yes yes..

DO: like, so we call it like so many new words came from feminism, right? "Femicide" and I don't even remember..

JS: Oh and then you have a word such as "mansplaining", if that is what you think of?

DO: Exactly, yes.

JS: So those kind of concepts that sort emanates out of..

DO: Yes, making words, naming things. It is all because they want to have some political power.

JS: Yes sure.

DO: Yea "Hell Joseon", I don't know. It is politicized whether someone who invented the word intended it or not, it is very political. But I doubt that is really gonna..

JS: .. Change anything?

DO: .. Yes, change the situation.

JS: Okay.

DO: But still, people realize, right? Realize that the situation we are in. I think that is one good site.

JS: Okay, just to draw a parallel to the dirt/gold spoon thing - would that be the same case? Is that also a new expression emanating from a certain political.. or is it something you have always had? I don't know if you can trace back the first time you heard about it?

DO: I think it was, maybe 2 years ago, only 2 years ago.

JS: Okay so that's pretty new.

DO: But I don't, I still don't like that word. "*geumsujeo*" and "*heuksujeo*" and everything, because that is gonna make my parent sad. Because it basically blames our parents, right? I don't like that word.

JS: Well yes, that's one way of seeing it. That is actually true.

DO: Yes my parents don't have money, don't have much money, but still they raised me good. They tried their best. And I am 100% satisfied with my life, but that word points at my parents and not me. So that's why I don't like that word.

JS: Sure, and you think the same thing goes for the people born with the golden spoon? Do you also think they would feel? Because that is almost the.. would that be the opposite, like you are discrediting? If you come from a golden spoon family, and succeed well, then you are also taken away your credit. In another sense, right?

DO: It is my personal opinion, but golden spoon.. I think they like that word. Yes, because nothing is gonna hurt. When you are a "*geumsujeo*" here in Korea, nothing is gonna hurt. People always respect you, and admire you, so even if I was a daughter in a "*geumsujeo*" family, I was gonna like that word.

JS: Okay sure. What does it take to be a golden spoon kid? Is there any.. just like you have poverty line.. I suppose there is not a real explanation. Do you have a minimum wage or amount of capital that you need to.. who does it cover, this expression?

DO: I don't have the specific numbers, but since inequality matters more and more, the "*geumsujeo*", the covery, is getting smaller and smaller I think. So if you have enough money,

they don't call it "kumseja", you have to be super, super rich, that's.. just beyond our imagination. Because that is how you are gonna live well in Korea. With some of the money..

JS: And equally, if the amount of people with capital, we see that it is concentrating more and more, is the lower part of the society, the poor people, is that a growing amount, or is it stable? And I don't expect you to know the real answer, I am just wondering if.. yes..

DO: Well actually when I was working with Korean Human Rights Foundation, I had this research about inequality for about a month, so if I look at that material I am gonna have a specific number, but still, what I found out is that the bottom part is growing, and the upper part is narrowing.

JS: So it is a pyramid just slowly..

DO: Yes but very severely. And it is more about like a.. (Hand gesture)

JS: Oh, like a time-glass or what you call it..

DO: Yes yes

JS: With a gap between, so the middle-class will be shrinking.

DO: Exactly, disappearance middle-class yes.

JS: And that is sort of the glue in society, right? The middle class is always considered to bind everything together..

DO: Yes and that is why we are losing hope, because we are not even gonna be a middle-class, and upper class NO..

JS: Yes yes of course.. Yes because one thing is knowing that you are not gonna be super rich, I mean, I can leave without that..

DO: Yes that is why people buy drinks or the lottery, you know?

JS: Yes haha acknowledging the fact that I need luck. But knowing that the chances that I would be just a decent middle-class, if that is also out of sight, then I guess I would slowly start becoming pretty frustrated. So, on a more practical level, everyday level, when do you encounter. when do you hear the expression of hell jouseon? like when was the last time you heard of it? If you have any idea about that.

DO: Hm.. I still have friends.. I just became a journalist, right? I just entered, I am not a journalist, but I just entered a news organization.

JS: Yes.

DO: But I still have many friends who are trying to have a job, unemployed. And when I.. having drinks with them or talking to them, soo.. a month ago.. one of those friends, she works on KBS - but not on a.. we called it "*junggyujik*" and "*bijunggyujik*", that's uhm..

JS: Irregular, or?

DO: Yes. no. Yes, irregular is "*bijunggyu*", so.. by contract, and your employment is guaranteed for ever, but uhm.. uh, "*bijunggyujik*", that's uhm not really uhm..

JS: Is it more just like freelance? Because normally in Denmark we distinguish between people on a regular contract in a news agency or people who are just working freelance, selling in an article to one newspaper and another..

DO: Syndicate?

JS: Yes not sure about what that is..

DO: Let me find that word..

JS: Okay cool.. but is this distinction, is it something that goes for only journalism or all kinds of occupations?

DO: All kind of jobs..

JS: Okay cool, cool.

DO: Ah, temporary. Temporary.

JS: So only for a short-term?

DO: Yes.. so uhm she is working for KBS as a non-regular worker, and her employment contract renews every two year, and it is unstable, right? She has to always be like.. her boss and everything. So she was complaining to me that KBS has much, so much non-regular workers and they exploit those people, because they can always fire them. And if you don't like them, you are gonna make up your excuses right?

JS: Yes sure.

DO: "uh, she was really, like lazy and didn't get her job well" and everything. So she was complaining that her boss was harassing her colleagues who is a non-regular worker, and she cannot really say anything about this situation..

JS: Because then she is gonna be one of them?

DO: exactly, so uhm, she will say that this is such a Hell Joseon

JS: Yes, that's a good example.. getting to know in what context is the expression actually used.

DO: Actually I think, especially those who are in their 20s and 30s, we use that word a lot.

JS: Yes yes.. as a way to express?

DO: Anger. Anger and frustration, because.. the one I just told you about, she.. her.. we call it "SPEC", right? Specification, her resumé is fantastic, and actually she has this skills, but she is 32 now, and she is maybe too old to hire as a new... new member of the organization?

JS: Yes?

DO: Yes because as you know, Korea is age-based country, right?

JS: Yes..

DO: So no matter how good she is, you are not gonna hire her if she is too old..

JS: Because it is gonna cause problems with.. ranks?

DO: Exactly. So you are my boss, and you are younger than me, and they see it as "oh, I am a troublemaker", but that makes sense, here. I understand. those kind of vicious cycle..

JS: Hm yes but that really complicates it

DO: Yes exactly haha

JS: If you cannot hire someone who is.. I mean, in order to get the right experience, it can take years, but if those years mean that you will not be considered because of your age.. that's really a dilemma or contradiction in some way. So that.. Again, so that is something cultural mixed up with more.. what can I call it.. socio-economic or capitalist or.. because, the age thing is that something you can trace back to the Joseon dynasty, or?

DO: I think since the beginning of this country. *Yugyo*-based country, they all respect age. Maybe too much respect. Non-necessary respect, I think.

JS: Do you think it is changing?

DO: Hm.. yes! Because, in journalism industry, they hire more of skilled journalist who already have experiences.. it is more.. it is moving to those kind of..

JS: Merit based?

DO: yes yes.. so age will not really matter in the end. And my personal experience, at the foundation (her prior workplace), last year, my direct boss I think she was younger than me, and I didn't have any problem, because she worked three years more than I did.

JS: Yes sure.

DO: Yes so. I think people will eventually really think "oh, that's not gonna really matter". I don't like, society, entirely society based..

JS: It is very difficult to predict, right? Personally, I think it is positive that at least someone think it is gonna change. Again, as a foreigner, I have a hard-time with these age-based politeness levels and.. to me, saying "thank you" is polite, right? The thing is you can say "thank you" in four different ways with different levels of politeness, so based on how I say "thank you", it can actually be presumed very disrespectful. If I had "komawo" to someone very old, like my "halmoni" (grandmother in Korean), then people are just laughing when I say it. But I heard someone say it to their friends, so I thought "okay that means thank you", so I just used it, but I used it in the wrong context.. yea, that's my real struggle..

DO: So, do you speak Korean?

JS: I am slowly learning it.. we have a small small "hangul hakyo" (Korean school) in Copenhagen, with like a little Korean community.

DO: Wauw, that's awesome.

JS: Yes, it's kind of nice. So every Saturday, from 9 to 12, we are maybe 15 danish slash Korean-adoptees slash international people just gathering and trying to learn Korean. But it is very.. it's not on a very ambitious level.

DO: (laughing)

JS: But it works for me, now I can read it, I can write the alphabet, right? That was like the main obstacle for me.

DO: Hot water or just cold? (pouring water in my cup)

JS: Just cold.. I am very superstitious about drinking warm water.

DO: Why?

JS: My mom and my grandmother have always told me not to drink warm water, but that is because if you drink it right from the tap in the sink, warm water is full of bacteria, but I suppose here you warm it, right? So I guess that's the difference. So, I just have to get used to it. I've never drank hot water.

DO: Really?

JS: Yes, just like plain, hot water, I think it was the first time I did it last week.

DO: Wauw.

JS: Because I will, connect it to something that can be bad.

DO: So uhm, do you already have your thesis? Like thesis statement or?

JS: Not at all, I have a very tentative research question, which is like "what are the narratives built up around Hell Joseon" and.. where does it emanate from? Like basically the questions I've been asking you.. Yea I am really just.. I guess this is what you would call a very inductive research, because I don't have a main theory or anything to go from, I am just.. slowly adapting, every time I get new information, I try to.. maybe go down this road, or go down that road..

DO: hmmm.. interesting.

JS: Well yes, but I don't really know if it is the right way to do it..

DO: It is going to be hard to put it all together, right?

JS: Yes it will. Because there are so many dots to connect, right? But in the end, I guess I will end up with a very detailed map and a lot of different relations and connections between one situation and another situation and one expression and another expression, like.. you have unemployment, and then you have employment, and then you have irregular employment and then you have the golden spoon and.. all these different things, and you can connect it in many ways.

DO: Yes..

JS: If I can find sort of a method to make it all comprehensive.. then I guess I have reached my goal.. But already now I have come to learn so much about it. This whole gold-spoon/dirt-spoon, this is something new to me, and the "escape Korea", what is it, not Hell Joseon, but..

DO: "Tal Joseon"

JS: Yes exactly, that is also.. so you see, there are more and more layers, and sub-expressions and connected expressions..

DO: hmm.. hmm..

JS: I don't know if you have heard about the "generation of.. the give-ups.. or something"

DO: OH yes, "dalgwan-se-dae"

JS: Yes I think I've heard something with "sampo"..

DO: Oh yes, sampo right. So, "gives up three things"

JS: Yes!

DO: Yes, "sampo-se-dae"

JS: Okay.. what did you say?

DO: I said "dalgwan-se-dae"

JS: Okay and what..

DO: It is more about Japanese culture and we have those kind of generation.. "dalgwan" means uhm.. it's more.. it's beyond giving up

JS: Oh okay.. wauw, beyond giving up..

DO: Yes haha beyond giving up - you are just accepting this Hell Joseon reality and just living on a minimum wage.. so if I had "cheon-won" today, we don't really try hard, we just like, "how can I live with a "cheon-won"", and they don't really find.. like they don't really thrive, they are just like, no matter how hard you try, you are not gonna make more than "cheon-won", so you are accepting that lifestyle, that's what we call "dal-gwan-se-dae". And "sampo" is more like.. "shin-yang-ton" - 10 years ago..

44:20

JS: Okay, so that is also something a little newer?

DO: Yes, "sampo", and "opo" and "chilpo"

JS: So 5 and 7 as well?

DO: Yea, we are now like 7.. "7-po"

JS: So, 7 give-ups?

DO: Yes, yes..

JS: So, what do you give up then?

DO: I don't really remember, like "sampo" is marriage, and giving birth, and I don't know.. buying house or something.

JS: Yes, yes okay. So like very basic?

DO: Yes so like "chilpo" is.. I don't know.. maybe I'll google it.

JS: Nah I can probably google it myself.

DO: I am wondering now, super worry.

JS: Okay then let's find out!

DO: UUH, so 3-5-7-9!

JS: Nine?

DO: Yes. So 3 is "dating, marriage and giving birth", and "opo" is "meeting people and buying house", and 7-po.. is "getting a job and HOPE", and 9-po is "Health and education".

JS: Oh wauw. So it is basically the whole stage of..

DO: Hahah yes, this is Hell Joseon!

JS: So is that the.. that is kind of a good way to sum it up, right? Like the result of living in.. is all this things you are giving up on..

DO: Yes, buying a house in Seoul - I never dreamed of it.

JS: No? What about renting, how are the possibilities of finding a decent rental apartment?

DO: Uh, I've been living in Seoul for three years, and for first two years, in lived in "ko-shi-wan", that is this tiny little space with desk, chair and bed.. that's it. You don't have a space to move, it's a cube!

JS: So like a very small studio?

DO: Yes, without deposit.. it's worse than dorm.

JS: oh wauw..

DO: Yea if you ask your girlfriend what "ko-shi-won" is, she is gonna explain what "ko-shi-won" is, basically.. uhm.. people who can't afford a subtle amount of deposit, they go there. Because, "*koshiwon*" has.. still has like minimum things to live in, but it's not.. it's not designed for a person to live in.. it's suffocating!

JS: It sounds rather cruel, to have such kinds of places.

DO: Yes, so I lived there for two years, and I lived to a office-tel and actually I've just moved in. It is just like, having a deposit makes your.. makes your quality of life drastically, dramatically different.

JS: Okay, and what amount of deposit are we talking? In Denmark you usually pay three months of salary.. no. sorry, of rent, in a deposit, you say you want to rent something, a 1.000 dollars a month, then you pay 3.000 dollars in deposit, and get it back when you move out.

DO: Yes, but here in Korea.. I lived in the States, I paid.. so first month, I paid two month or three month of rent, right? But here, it is ten times or twenty times or even.. I don't know, it's a big amount of money.

JS: Okay, so it's massive?

DO: Yes, so uhm, for example, my monthly rent is 500 dollars, in that case, my deposit is exactly 10 times.

JS: wauw..

DO: But that kind of money, I didn't have it in the first place, right?

JS: Yes it takes pretty long time to accumulate that.

DO: Exactly,

JS: so, to save up.. if I had to save up 10 times my rental.. I not sure I would be able to do that.

DO: Exactly, that's why people who are living outside of Seoul cannot easily move in, for the benefit of information or network. Because of the deposit!

JS: So that's is where it comes into play, when you need to find a place to rent..

DO: Yes exactly.

JS: Where are these rooms located?

DO: "*Koshiwon*"?

JS: Yes.

DO: Everywhere.

JS: Okay, so it's not just one area? It's like everywhere?

DO: Everywhere. I've seen, actually I lived near here, actually I moved to more stations with the sub, but near here, at least 5 to 10 "*koshiwons*" around here, and one "*koshiwon*" for example.. it's uhm, this building, and 3rd floor is "*koshiwon*" for example, that floor maybe like 40 people live in.

JS: Ah sure, so that's actually a lot of different small and individual..

DO: Yees, sharing one kitchen, sharing one bathroom, for example. It depends on each "*koshiwon*", but yea it's horrible.

JS: So, you wouldn't classify it as some kind of collective.. a place where you decide to move in with a lot of friends to create a little community.. like in Denmark, the most common constellation of living on your own, when you move out from your parents, we turn 18-19, we find an apartment with two friends - one friend or three friends or something - and then you move in together, and you have this little "rental-community" or whatever where you contribute equally to groceries and rental and..

DO: So uhm.. "Share-house" is happening, but still.. that one still is..

JS: But you still need the deposit, right?

DO: Exactly.

JS: And although you are three people you still need..

DO: Exactly. Deposit and uhm, for a good share-house you have to be a competitive candidate to get in. So it's.. So Hell Joseon is.. I don't know it's a very complicated matter.. Koreans are very competitive. All sorts of competition right?

JS: Yea yea.

DO: Because it is Hell Joseon, because "I have to survive", that's making people's live harder.

JS: Yes. But at the same time, like, what you have been telling me, you met up with other people, applying for the same position, and rehearsing together. I am not sure that thing would happen in Denmark although you can call us as socialist or solidary as you want. But I am not sure that would actually happen. So what you say is competitive, to me that's a very beautiful moment of not being competitive.

DO: Yea yea that is true!

JS: Like realizing that you are in the same boat, "let's just try to.. "

DO: Yea "coexist".

JS: Exactly. Sort of. So you have competitiveness, but at the same time you have a very strong notion of togetherness..

DO: Yes that is true. I still see those people, like we just met for the interview, right? Still we remain as friends. Because, like you say, "in the same boat".

JS: yes, so it also connects people in some sense?

DO: Yes that is true, I never thought that way.

JS: No, neither did I. But it's just from what I have been hearing you telling me. What you are telling me is not that you disregard other people or that you do something mean to put yourself in a better position, it's.. it genuinely feels like you are actually competing on the same.. level.. because you all realize that.. hm, how can I say it, it's difficult. I would even tend to say that maybe people in Denmark can be more competitive, based on the ground that we don't really care what happens if you don't get the job, because then you can get 5 other jobs, so I don't have to be solidary with you, because it's not the end of the world. Like, does that make any sense?

DO: Yes..

JS: Like, we can actually afford to treat each other badly.. in a competitive manner, because it's just "one shot" and there will be "other shots".

DO: hmm, in that sense, the story that I told you was not really that beautiful, because..

JS: Oh, well.. okay

DO: Because. We did not get together, to help others.. it was to help me, so for example, in that kind of study group.. if one person gets greedy or selfish, that study group is fucked, you know?

JS: Yes.

DO: I'm gonna have all of your information, and I am not gonna tell you..

JS: Exactly.

DO: In that case, people know, right? And they should exclude that member. Because, "oh, you know, you are not really into this, and you are not really helping us".

JS: Ah okay, so dishonesty would exclude you from this kind of community that you need to part of to become good yourself? I think it is hard to deny that being selfish, or what do you call the opposite, altruistic? There is always this contradiction between, if you do something good for other people, do you do it because you genuinely want to be good to others or because you know that they would do something good for you? And this whole discussion. But just the fact that you all recognize that "we have to do something good for each other, because that's gonna create a greater good", that's good enough for me to classify it as, you know..

DO: I think, I just realized as hearing what you said, maybe that's why we.. I mean, we 20 or 30, young generation, they see it.. this society situation as generational problem. Because we are trying this hard, and we are getting together to get through this, and what you are doing - like older people - you are just sitting there and judging us.

JS: Yes, that's.. yes because, from my perspective - now I am very much being part of this interview right? - but people like.. parents will always only be focusing on their own children, whereas you as a child, as a young adult, as an adult, you are more like.. you need other people as well. Whereas the parent can mainly focus on just one or two children. Yea but I don't know. Not sure where I am going at.

DO: I think that we are covering so much concepts and problems haha

JS: Yes but it's perfect..

DO: Yes we've been on for an hour

JS: Yep, 57 minutes on record.

DO: So uhm..

JS: Yea, maybe I'm just going to stop it now. Unless you have a final comment?

DO: No I am good if you have more questions..

JS: I have more information than I could have dreamt of

DO: oh haha okay, which is good right?

JS: Yes it is, just making sure I am not deleting this!

8.6 Appendix 6: Interview with Chang-ho (Without recording)

Date: 18th March - 20th April, 2017 (face to face conversation and clarifying follow-up questions via internet)

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Chang-ho. Initials: CH

JS: What themes are connected to Hell Joseon?

CH:

- Unemployment
- Hierarchical structures
- Gender issues

“We have the right to say it – not outsiders”

- almost similar to the N-word

education fever –

“I selected a major in business although I was not really interested in business.”

JS: What would you have liked to study then?

CH: Perhaps some political science or humanities.

JS:

CH: I think there are two layers in the meaning of the word ‘Hell Joseon’. First layer is related with our everyday experiences in Korea. We are experiencing several “mistaken authoritarianisms” in this country. Female discrimination (authority of men over women), ‘*Gab-Jil*’, and order of rank in workplaces are the general cases.

‘*Gab-jil*’ is a compound of ‘*Gab*’ (first stem of the ten celestial stems) and ‘*Jil*’ (slang of ‘doing’). There are order between consumer and seller, employer and employee, big company and their subcontractor, head office and its franchisee, etc. And if the former afflicts or threaten the later, we call it *Gab-jil*. Mostly we just mean *Gab-jil* between people not company when we’re talking about Hell Joseon.

I think the cause of the first layer is that the attackers lack self-esteem because they also were the victims of authoritarianism before. It’s vicious circle.

And the second layer is the economic structure of Korea. No matter how much we strive, it is really hard to get a fine job. And who get a better chance to have a better job and live as they want are from rich families. So there is a neologism, ‘spoon class theory’, which classifies every people into ‘dirt spoon’ to ‘golden spoon’ from their born.

When we realize something is going wrong in the society, we can find out the cause and do something to change it.

Decades ago the young people protested dictators and government and wicked capitalists, because they thought they were the root of trouble.

Nowadays however, we cannot find out what is the exact cause of this irrationality and against what we should protest.

When we call this situation “Hell Joseon”, we can have a little bit of relief that at least we get to know the cause. "Hell Joseon" is the passive way of expressing our anger, giving some cynical smile to our society. Also we use the term to sympathize each other's situation.

Once, a strange man attempted to sexually attack a woman on a narrow aisle of a building. She barely ran out of the site and find the police to request for checking CCTV. But the police rejected and said, there is no legal basis and she should think of man's honor.

Another example: three female college students were in the restaurant and sexually abused by three men next to their table, without any reason. These were really happened to some of my girlfriend's friends. When I heard those stories all that I can do is cursing “Hell Joseon”.

This is another example of ‘sympathy’: when I talk with my friends about our future, we feel a bit of solidarity by using this term.

I think the term “Hell Joseon” has no actual power of change society but it act as a storage of anger. When it comes to situation like ‘Candle Revolution’, people take out their anger and head to plaza.

‘*Gab-Jil*’ is a fragment of Hell Joseon. I think it is related to pariah capitalism of Korea. Sense of “Money is the word” makes some people put other people down.

According to 'Namu Wiki (one of korean wiki)', Hell Joseon originated in the History Gallery of a famous online community, DC inside. DC History Gallary users perceive Joseon as a country like garbage. So they started to use this word to criticize Korea.

And many Korean think that much of long-existing evil(and corruption) from Japanese colonial era and dictatorship are remaining uncleaned. So we found Joseon a perfect word to explain Korea, has not been progressed from the pre-modern era.

Also, considering Hell Joseon is usually used when the situation of Misogyny, I think there are relationship with the fact that Joseon was a extreme Confucian country, which ignores woman right.

8.7 Appendix 7: Interview with Hyun-woo

Date: 25h January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Hyun-woo. Initials: HW

JS: So, as I have explained to you, or as your cousin might have explained to you, my main interest is the expression of "Hell Joseon"

HW: Hell Joseon?

JS: Yes. So, do you know the expression?

HW: Yes. Everybody knows.

JS: Everybody knows it?

HW: Youngsters use it, I think youngsters use it because in the web, the internet, many youngsters use it to express you know, bad culture in Korea.

JS: Yes okay, so bad culture. Okay. And, how old are you, if I can ask?

HW: Uhm, 34 years old, in Korean..

JS: So, 32?

HW: Yes 32.

JS: Okay, so, you think that people in their 20s and 30s are using the expression?

HW: Yes, teenagers, from teenagers to maybe 30s, they use that word. And I think older men they know the expression, but they don't use it.

JS: Yea, okay. Would you use it, if you talked your parents, for example?

HW: Uh, you know, I can't use this word to my parents or bad people, you know, that word includes a bad meaning, bad things, something like a disgracing our country.

JS: Okay, yes sure.

HW: Some old people doesn't like it.

JS: Okay, and in what situation would you use "Hell Joseon"? When would you say it?

HW: Ah, for example, like ehm, you know, there is a corruption now, politics.

JS: Choi soon-sil?

HW: Yes and president, Park Geun-hye, miss Park, that's because it is Hell Joseon.

JS: Okay, so the reason why the scandal is, is because of?

HW: I think it is related to "confucius" (confucianism), something like a Chinese culture

JS: Oh okay.

HW: Actually we admire, I mean, we.. the people teach Korean students in young age, like ehm "you should respect to old people" or "you should be polite" and then we also something like .. we don't have some (noblige noblige - can't tell what is being said) - which America or European culture, so rich people have (noblige noblige), right? But we don't have it, because there are many rich people in Korea, but the difference is they just only have money, haha, only money.

JS: Ah okay, what don't they have? What are they lacking?

HW: They don't have something like obligation for, or loyalty for country, like volunteer or something. Because you know, in England, many youngsters they volunteer to join the army in the world war 2 or 1, they don't hesitate to join the army, right?

JS: Sure, sure.

HW: Most the are graduated ethon school or something, but they know how to sacrifice themselves for their country, you know, for their people.

JS: Volunteering?

HW: Yea, volunteer. But in Korea, that is not happen, there is no.

JS: But how can you.. because as far as I know in Korea, it's mandatory, the military service.

HW: uhum, uhum.

JS: So, you as a young male, have to go to the army?

HW: Yes.

JS: So how can you talk about volunteering and sacrificing?

HW: Actually, you know, there is example, some rich people, rich family, they don't want to send their children to the army.

JS: Okay.

HW: So they use some corruption, corruptive way, something like bribery and they just.. they want to get a exception for their children.

JS: So, if you have enough money you can pay your way out of the military service?

HW: So actually, all Korean men should join the army, must join.

JS: Yes yes.

HW: Must serve the army if they are healthy, uh, they use some bad way. They go to doctor, take a medical test, but the give them money, money to doctor, to make a fake report.

JS: Oh, like "he has a bad bag".

HW: Yes yes!

JS: Or "his legs are not.."

HW: Yes, so it is one of ways to serve the army in easy way, right? Some public service, not army, just public service.

JS: Oh yes okay, that's interesting. Can I ask if you went to the army?

HW: I, 2005, I joined the army as a "katusa", "katusa" which works with the US Army

JS: Okay ahh.

HW: I would be in Yongsan.

JS: In Yongsan.

HW: For two years.

JS: Two years?

HW: Yes as military police.

JS: Military police, okay. Only in Yongsan, or did you go Seoul or to the border?

HW: Only in Yongsan.

JS: Okay. And how was that? I am very interested, I've never really talked to anyone about how it is to be in the military service.

HW: It's mandatory you know, but many rich people or many powerful families they use corrupted way to, you know, avoid military service for their children.

JS: But, is this a part of "Hell Joseon"?

HW: Yes it is part of Hell Joseon, that's why youngsters call our country "Hell Joseon", because these people use a bad way, right?

JS: Sure, sure. So you spend two years in the army? Working together with the American Army?

HW: Uhum, yes.

JS: How was that? were you happy that you had to go, or were you sad? How old were you at that time? 2005, you must have been 20 or?

HW: 22, I was young.

JS: Okay. Personally, I have never been in the army, so I don't really know how it is.

HW: Aaaah.

JS: If you have any, like, if you can tell any stories about good memories, bad memories, or, that would be very interesting.

HW: In the army.. Ah, (snaps fingers), "Hell Joseon" is related to army culture, too.

JS: ohh.

HW: (Laughing). It's mandatory, you know. Army doesn't pay you well. Right? It's very.. our labour force is very cheap, you know?

JS: Yes well that's true

HW: (Laughing). And, the seniority, senior soldier, they.. sometimes they push the juniors to much, they use bad words, or sometimes they use some.. what is it.. violence?

JS: Yes, violence.

HW: Voilence.

JS: So they punish you violently, or?

HW: Yes punished us, like, use a.. hitting juniors (laughing)

JS: Okay, and what can you do if someone is violent? As a junior, is there anything you can do? Can you complain, or?

HW: Yes, juniors they can complain, but most juniors they cannot. Because, you know, there are many eyes, and sometimes - even if they tells their complains to officer - sometimes they just ignore it.

JS: Yes okay.

HW: Because it's army. So, in army, you know, some like in.. in korean word, "just do it" if I order you. Something like that. "Follow the order".

JS: Yes okay, so "don't think, just.."

HW: YES "don't think!", haha, "just do as what I say, what I order to you", and it's mandatory, there is no options.. it's kinda like Korean culture too. And it's connected to my company too.

JS: Okay, your company? So how do you compare being in the military to working in a company?

HW: Because sometimes my boss, many bosses, ordered their employees to "do it", without thought, and - haha - if I have my opinion, but it's very difficult to, uhm, speak my opinion to my boss or my team mate.

JS: Sure, sure.

HW: It is easily ignored, by seniors.

JS: So they would ignore you, if you said your opinion?

HW: Yes yes yes, they don't listen, because they already have an answer. They want to follow.. they want employees to follow their thoughts and orders. Without suggestion or..

JS: Okay, so is that a good employee in Korea? A good employee in Korea, how would you characterize?

HW: Uh, good employee? Something like "just follow the order", without complain, and work late, work at night, work late, even if, you know they finish their work at 11PM or midnight.

JS: Midnight?

HW: Yes.

JS: And then when do you meet in, in the morning?

HW: My company, I should be in the office until 8am.

JS: Okay, so from 8AM to midnight?

HW: uhum.

JS: Is that a normal working day?

HW: It's not normal. Actually, 8am to 6pm, 8 to 6 is normal working hours, but I never.. I mean, I barely finish my work at 6.

JS: Okay.

HW: 6pm, I, uhm, normally I finish my work at 7.30, or 7. around 8pm. But..

JS: Okay, I have heard about people there are worse off.

HW: Yea but my case is not that bad, because there are many bad cases, and.. around me, I find a lot of friends, they work very late, and.. because you know, the country, Korea has a lot of working hours, compared to European countries.

JS: Yes, I think Korea has the highest amount of working hours in the OECD, as far as I know.

HW: Yes but.. productivity is very low (laughing)

JS: Really?

HW: Yes! (laughing)

JS: Okay. (laughing). So what do you exactly do, when you are at work? How do you mean the productivity is low? If you work from 8 to 8, then do you have a lot of breaks or?

(Bear in mind that this interview was conducted on a weekday on a café from 1pm-3pm)

HW: So actually, you know, the thing is, bosses - they don't leave around 6pm, they don't go home. That's a problem. They are just sitting in their chair, sometimes playing the games or, they don't work. They just watching. keeping an eye on their employees to do work. Because I he left the office, everybody would go home (laughing)

JS: Yes, of course (laughing). Have you ever tried going home, before your boss leaves?

HW: Yes sure, because I hate this culture and tradition, some.. if I look rude, I don't care, because if I don't have work, there is no reason to stay in the office.

JS: Yes, exactly. So, what happens if you leave before your boss? Have you ever experienced something?

HW: I just, uhm. Timing is very important. If I use that card frequently, it will be a serious problem.

JS: Okay.

HW: Because boss think, consider, "uh, he doesn't have a lot of work", "Okay, I will give him work" (laughing), this problem.

JS: Yes okay. So if you finish early it means you don't have enough work to do? Is that the assumption, that you are not working hard enough, if you go home early?

HW: Yes, right. They think working late is kind of a.. working late is working good (laughing). They regard working late a working good, and that's a problem. Is it not smart.

JS: So, timing is.. ?

HW: It means I just keep an eye on my boss' actions, whether he is in the office, in his chair or not, sometimes you know, if he leaves his chair of office, because he is a smoker, it's timing. I just turn off the computer and go home.

JS: Ah sure, makes sense.

HW: Because no visible is okay (laughing)

JS: And do you ever work from home?

HW: Yea, sometimes I bring my laptop and a work at home, because.. because I don't want to go to the office in the weekend.

JS: Yes yes sure.

HW: So that's why I bring my laptop..

JS: Oh, so in the weekends you work? but you just do it from home?

HW: Yes but sometimes, but I usually, if I have work, if I need to work in the weekend, yea I go to office.

JS: Okay, shit.. I am sorry man, it's. I don't know how to deal with it, it's just so different from what I am used to.

HW: My case is better, because you know, other people they suffering from bad culture of company. There is no exit, because they have family. They just work and follow their boss's, orders.

JS: Okay I see. So you don't.. you are not married, you don't have kids?

HW: I am single now

JS: Okay. Is it easier to be alone when you have this kind of work? You think it's more complicated if you have family as well?

HW: Uhm, there's one case. My co-worker, she's woman, she's married, and she has two kids. So she already requested a vacation for one week.

JS: One week?

HW: Yes she planned to go philippines with her family, but actually no. All procedures with the company is finished, and she also got approval from her boss.

JS: Yes.

HW: But suddenly, you know, one day before starting vacation, suddenly the boss want her to cancel vacation. Because of report. He wanted her to finish a report.

JS: Yes.

HW: But I think it is not important. The report is not important. Because other people can substitute.

JS: Yes sure. So why do you think he did it?

HW: Uh, it's like.. I don't know. When I found this case, I was very upset, because you know. So she cancelled all the flight schedule and hotel and, also you know, told her family and children cry (laughing) and her husband also, you know, he cancelled his vacation. There are many uhm..

JS: Yes it's difficult, when you have to time everything, right?

HW: YES! If I were her, maybe I could be against my boss. I doesn't make sense.

JS: But the thing I am most surprised about is actually that she cancelled her vacation.

HW: She cancelled her vacation yes.

JS: So what would have happened if she had just said "I am sorry, but we had an agreement, I am going to the philippines". Because according to the law, she would have the right to do that, right?

HW: She has right, yes. To do it. But she couldn't. Because Korean culture.

JS: Yea. So she chose to listen to her boss, or?

HW: Yes I am not sure if the boss compensated the fee, cancellation fee, but I had that.. I don't know.

JS: Hm yes okay. And is this just one case, or have you other similar cases that.. ?

HW: It's an example, but there are many similar cases. I think leadership is very important, so.. who is the boss is very important. If she has good boss, maybe she can have her vacation. But her boss is bad.

JS: Yes wauw that's.. so in that sense, it is easier to be single, since you don't have family to think about? Or what? It is also difficult for you?

HW: In my case, it's my choice. I can marry earlier, but I want to enjoy my life more so I chose to be a single. But I heard that many youngsters in Korea, sometimes they give up marriage because of money or employment, or something.

JS: So, they give up? They just say "I am not gonna be married because it's too.." ?

HW: Yes. One of my close friends, he work at a biker store. But, actually the pay is not good, compared to some office job.

JS: Is he a mechanic?

HW: uhm he is a sale.. sales department of motorbike. He is a clerk, he is not owner. He had a girlfriend, and they tried to get married, but you know, in Korea to get married it cost (laughing) it cost a lot, because of money. Normally, the man should prepare the house, housing and care.

JS: What do you mean with preparing a house?

HW: I mean buying apartment or rent.

JS: Yes, really? And the same thing with a car?

HW: Yes. But the woman just prepare some furniture, refrigerator, or something. Anyway, you know, it cost a lot for men.

JS: Yes it seems very expensive. So what kind of house is acceptable? Is there a certain standard of housing that you need?

HW: Yes there's some.. One room, that's not an option. (Laughing) so maybe two rooms, maybe. At least two rooms. Most women want it. Anyways, he failed in marriage. My friend failed in marriage because of money.

JS: Are they still together?

HW: No, they broke up because of money. And, you know, I found out that many couples break up, because of.. I mean, during the preparation of marriage, because it's about the money. Right? And also, their parents involving in this discussion, this money problem. "Who provide this, and who provide this". It's also Korean culture, and youngsters doesn't like it. It's connected to Hell Joseon too.

JS: Sure, okay okay good. But, if both the girl and the boy - or two boys or whatever - but if both parts, they don't like this kind of culture, then why don't you just get married without apartment? Do it your own way.

HW: Yes yes right, exactly what I want to say. And that is right, what you are saying is very correct and right. But Korean people, they just consider other people's eyes, other people's thoughts. That's the problem, something like a.. if both they are happy, it's okay, right?

JS: Sure, that's how I would think.

HW: Yes, but Korean, most Korean people think of other's thoughts and eyes, and they don't want to show.. they don't want to be shown at low level.

JS: Yes yes.

HW: Right? They think about it. There is some standard level - everybody think - about marriage, about company, so everybody you know, want to enter big company, like Hyundai, Samsung, SK and.. actually you know, western people they don't care about the company's name, right?

JS: Uhm, to some extent. Of course we care a little, and it's difficult for me to say, I am also just one person, right? - but we have a hierarchy in Denmark as well, top 10 companies, Mærsk, a shipping company, Novo Nordisk, they make medicine, and LEGO, for example, the make these small.. you know LEGO? Those are the big international corporations, and of course they are popular.

HW: Ohh, many youngsters want to join those companies?

JS: Young people would like to, but nothing is wrong if I don't end up there. It's like, it's very unrealistic. So, in my dream, of course I would like to part of Mærsk or one of the big companies, but I don't really cry at night if I don't go there. How can I say - it would be nice to play for manchester united, but if I just play for Burnley or Crystal Palace, it's still okay. Right? I think that's how most Danish people think.

HW: Because in Korea, people think you know.. If Korean people looks at some sweepers in the street, or valid parking people or something, they think that those kind of people are very kind of low level. In Korea, low position.

JS: Oh, is that your phone? You can just pick it up.

HW: (Leaves for taking a phone call)

JS: Okay, so where did we come from?

HW: Actually you know, professions, they are equal, right?

JS: Uhm, they should be. In the perfect world.

HW: But in Korea they just.. when they see this kind of people they think maybe "oh he didn't study very hard in school", you know, "he's unsmart", "he's poor", something like that. Disrespecting them. Sometimes people ignores some low position people, that serious problem in Korea.

JS: Yes yes.

HW: And, actually, taxi driver and bus driver, they work very hard, and sometimes they are satisfied with their job, right? But most Korean people think.. like ignore them..

JS: But, do you think that is unique to Korean, or is it like that in other countries as well?

HW: I don't know the western culture, but I heard that in Australia and other countries, actually, they can think like that, the same way, but they don't show it. they just.. In appearance, they respect them. They regard it as one of our professions, someone got to do it, right?

JS: Okay sure. Because in my opinion I would say this kind of class, we have classes in all kinds of the world, like also in Denmark, people would tend to look down upon people working in a kitchen or cleaning toilets and stuff like that, so I don't think it's unique to Korea, But maybe the way we treat them..

HW: Treat them, right, exactly. Because, if I drive some small car, some efficient car, Korean people can ignore me, I am not rich people and I am poor, so they think "uuuh". Sometimes they can't be good to me, if I drive a small car to restaurant, but if I drive a van or BMW, to go to restaurant, the restaurant people respect me.

JS: Okay, wauw.

HW: How can they know my wealth? They are just judging me by appearance, like clothes or something like car (laughing).

JS: And what happens when you tell them that you work in a big company, a respected company, do they also treat you with more respect?

HW: Yes yes right. Actually I am working at Hyundai.. and some..

JS: Was that a dream of yours, to work for one of the big Korean companies?

HW: It's not my dream. My dream is starting my own business.

JS: Oh okay okay. And let me know if I am asking too many personal questions.

HW: No I think it's okay.

JS: So starting your own business is your..

HW: It has been 6 years since I joined this company, and still I can't get used to it, this culture.

JS: Did you ever spend time outside Korea? Did you ever go abroad, went for studies, or have you always lived in Korea?

HW: Yes, I have lived in Korea all time, actually, I didn't get the opportunity to go exchange student or something, but I travel a lot.

JS: So you have always lived in Korea.. I just wanted to know.

HW: Yes, you know, many young people want to immigrate to other country like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, because Korea is very difficult is very difficult to get a job.. Or, actually, getting a job is okay in Korea, but the thing is, as I told you, people disrespect the low-level job.

JS: Oh yes okay. So do you think people would rather be unemployed than having a bad job?

HW: What?

JS: Like, instead of choosing a what you call an unrespected job, do people chose to be unemployed instead?

HW: Yea right. They just.. actually I think.. there is high unemployment in Korea, but I think people can get a job in small company, or some low-position job, but they don't want. They chose to be unemployed. Because if it's not big company, they just chose to be unemployed, because in Korea people disrespect low-level jobs. But in New Zealand or some other developed countries, they don't.. they respect low-position job. In appearance, I don't know their inner mind. Actually one of my friends, he is a fitness trainer, he tried to get a job in Korea for.. but there is no opportunity in Korea, so he prepared to go to new zealand, so it's kind of immigration, with his girlfriend. Because, he think it is very difficult to live in Korea, and also he worry about kids education and..

JS: Oh so they have a child?

HW: No no no, they don't have a child, but they think of their future. And also, you know, Korea, high competition in the school. It's also Hell Joseon. Every parents they push their children to study very hard, most parents thinks studying is only way to be successful. So, sometimes, many students, some students, they suicide themselves, because of high competition.

JS: Yes I've heard about that, it's very tragic. Where did you graduate from? Which university?

HW: I graduated Yonsei University.

JS: So, one of the SKY..

HW: Yes right. I'm.. it's very difficult to enter that university, I don't want to go back to high school, it was too tough. And actually, I don't want to.. if I have child, I don't want them to experience same thing.

JS: So, high school is.. or, what is the most difficult part during the education system? What was the most competition? From you were a kid till you finished? What was most stressful?

HW: High School. Because, to enter the university there is the one exam.

JS: The "suneung"?

HW: Yes something like the SAT. So for three years in high school, I studied like a zombie in the library.

JS: Can you explain a normal week for you during high school?

HW: Sure, in High School? My school is public school, nobody listen to teacher's word, they just sleep while in the class..

JS: Okay!

HW: Me too, I charge my energy in the public school, and then, after school, I go to "hakwon"

JS: Ah yes okay.

HW: Yea "hakwon", it's private, you know. Private school, it's very expensive, I go there and, because there, the teachers in "Hakwon", they teach very well, and good quality, and they focus on the exam.

JS: So, when you are in normal high school, the public, that's when you sleep?

HW: Yea I sleep and, actually I.. if the teacher is very angry or something, I don't sleep. But if the teachers are weak or.. sometimes they teachers don't care about it.

JS: And what about like timewise? When did you go to school and stop going to school?

HW: It's like 8 to 4 pm, 8 to 3 pm..

JS: And then? "Hakwon"?

HW: Then go to "hakwon" for 2 or 3 hours a day, and then after that, almost 9pm, back to.. finish "hakwon", and then I go to library.

JS: And THEN you go to library?

HW: Yes to study. Actually, in my case, I was like a serious student (not exactly sure what is said here), so, I am hard a student, I study.. I focus on my study, to enter the good university, some student they just play and visit friends, and the result it tragic but.. (laughing)

JS: The result is a tragedy?

HW: Yes because it means they cannot the good university, they connect it to their employment, good company, big company.

JS: Oh yes okay. So when did you go home from library on a normal day? If you went there at 9, then how long would you stay at library?

HW: uhm, until 1am, I studied until 1am, and then I go back to my house and get sleep, and then I wake up at 7am and go to school again. So.. I have no memory of high school (laughing), because the only thing I do was studying.

JS: And when you look back, was it worth it? because you went to Yonsei (university) and now you have a good job?

HW: I am not.. actually, now I am not satisfied with my job and company, because my company pushes too much.. (sighs), so that's why I want to start my own business later. Sometimes, you know, now I am young, I have a value to.. the company think I have value. There is a value for me, because I am young, but if I will be over 40-45-40 years old or something, maybe the start to push me again like a..

JS: Oh okay. But you have been there for 6 years. Have you ever.. are you doing the same thing, or have you climbed the rank? How can I say it?

HW: Oh, promotion?

JS: Yes, yes exactly.

HW: Yes there is a promotion system. Now I am an assistant manager.

JS: So you also have responsibility of someone under you?

HW: Yes, I have juniors. But, I am not that position, in which I can order something to my.. actually, I ask them to do something, but I am also junior, I also get orders from my senioritis so..

JS: Ok ok, there was something else I wanted to ask you about, but now I forgot it. About the whole education system.

HW: Education?

JS: Yes, like, before you went to high school, what did you do then? You went to elementary school?

HW: Yes middle school. Actually the scores in middle-schools are not connected to university. Entering the university, so at that time, I didn't study too much. Sometimes I was hanging around with my friends and play soccer and good times. But at that time I also go to "Hakwon" (laughing), to, you know, get basic knowledge. About english and mathematics.

JS: Okay, and when did you start at "hakwon"? How old?

HW: Ehm, elementary school student.

JS: So how old is that, 7-8 or is it 10 or..

HW: My case 10 years old. I started to study mathematics in private academy.

JS: Okay, so that was the first thing you did. Is that normal, average, or?

HW: At that time it was average, but nowadays, maybe first grade in elementary school.

JS: Oh okay already first grades.

HW: Yes.

JS: So, you call yourself a specialist in "Hell Joseon"..

HW: Yes yes.

JS: .. that's what you wrote to me when I asked you to meet me.

HW: The thing is, people judge people by appearance, like money, car or something, they disrespect low position people.

JS: Yes. So, when was the first time you heard about the expression?

HW: 2 or 3 years ago, some people started using that expression

JS: And where did you first hear about it?

HW: Ehm, in internet. Website.

JS: Okay, website.

HW: Yes, they upload their thoughts.

JS: So, on the social media or? If you can be more specific?

HW: There is one website, people just share all the stuff, some pictures, funny things, some issues and politics, all of these.

JS: Okay, and that's where you..

HW: And sometimes people upload some article which is criticizing Korean culture, something. And people just, you know, make a comment for that article, right? They use the word, "Hell Joseon"

JS: Okay.

HW: "It's Hell Joseon, so we better go out of this country or something like that.

JS: Okay, give me a second, I will just go to the bathroom.

HW: Okay.

JS: (coming back). Okay, so the first place I first heard or saw it, was in international media, I think wall street journal had an article..

HW: Oh really?

JS: .. About ehm, it said something about "80% of Koreans want to go abroad - is it really "Hell Joseon", or something. And then I started watching more and more news, and every time they had a headline about something in Korea, they would use the headline with Hell Joseon, right? So, the first time I was in Korea, I never heard about it. It took me a while before people started explaining it to me. As a foreigner, I think it is difficult to experience the "Hell Joseon" because we have other conditions, if I can say.

HW: I think there is a big gap between youngsters and old people, because old people, you know, devoted their life to develop our country's economy. It was too fast, right? They sacrificed themselves, I respect that, right? But the thing is, material, I mean, is enough now - and youngsters, you know, in this society, they use internet and SNS and they know well about foreign countries', ehm developed countries' culture, so.. the youngsters, they think.. they want to be like that, but still you know, elder people blocked the.. what is it.. the majority, because old people is in high position, and their position is the leader, right?

JS: Sure, sure.

HW: So, youngsters doesn't want to follow it, but still there is big gap. Now, we can eat (laughing), but at that time - long time ago - there was no food to eat. Now we can eat, and we have enough food, and then youngsters they think more. More developed ideas and thoughts, like..

JS: So, your demands for a good life..

HW: Yes right!

JS: .. is different than the older generation? Or how can I understand it?

HW: It was just now they want their own town, free time, after work, even if they don't get paid well. So that's why many youngsters prepare the exam for public employees, it is very popular.

JS: Is it better to be in the government, to be public employed, or was the difference?

HW: The pay is low, but job security is very stable. And they can finish their work at 6pm, sharply..

JS: Like really, at 6pm.

HW: Yes sharply (laughing) and private companies they can lay-off their employees, depending on the situation, but public employees, their job situation is stable and they can do it until 65 years old. So that is why many youngsters, even if they are smart and they are good performers, they have good performance, they studied the exam for public employees. It's very.. it's a big loss in Korea.

JS: You think so?

HW: Many you know, those kind of youngsters who have good performance, they should devote their lives to some private sector or other industry, to develop our country, but they just want to avoid it.. they just want to get a stable job, want to get their own time, they don't want to sacrifice their time or energy to something.. this is a trend.

JS: But don't you think you can do something good to your country by working in a public sector?

HW: Actually, there is no meaning about that.. because they think about their personal life, work time, get a stable job, that's why many people focus on the exam, public government exam.

JS: But do you understand their choice?

HW: Yes I understand their choice, because sometimes the company pushes too much, pushes me too much, sometimes I think, "ah, I should have chosen some public sector" (laughing).

JS: Okay. And how is it - you work in private company now - but let's say you quit your job and apply for a position in the public sector - is that possible?

HW: Yes.. but maybe I better prepare the exam.

JS: Okay so there is an exam for getting a job in the public sector? How does that work? In order to get a job in the public sector, you need to go through an exam?

HW: Yes yes, there is exam for it.

JS: Okay, what kind of exam is that? I've never heard about it.

HW: Hm it's about Korean history and some other stuff, I don't know well. But there are some subjects about english test, some Korean history and something like that.

JS: Yes I find it very different from my country - that you have to take an exam to get a job. In Denmark, if you want to apply for a job - you send them your application, just one page, you send them your CV, and if they like you, if they like what you have been doing, they will ask you for an interview, they will talk to you, and then you will get a job.

HW: Ah yes yes I know.

JS: So, you don't have to.. this thing about taking an exam for a job, it's very new for me. Is it like that with all jobs in Korea, or?

HW: It is common. Because exam culture trends Korean.. because there is high competition, there are so many applicants, for limited position.

JS: Sure.

HW: So people needs some filtering system, so they try.. they take a test.

JS: Okay, has it always been like that or is it a new trend?

HW: It's not new trend, it's old trend.

JS: Okay that's interesting!

HW: Yea maybe Japan and China has same system like that.

JS: Okay so is it something cultural?

HW: It's about Asian culture.

JS: Okay. If you started your own company, how would you recruit employees?

HW: Ah, we also have a test about their competency, and their personality, and then - it's first filtering - and then, they should take interview, there's interview.. we interview them, there is two interviews. First employees interview, second is board of directors interview.

JS: Board of directors interview? That's a lot of different steps you have to go through.

HW: Yes yes right.

JS: And you would do the same thing if you started your own company?

HW: Yes I also take a test. Actually before taking test. I should pass some paper filtering, CV filtering, and then they inform me "it's okay to take a test", and then I take the test. And I pass the exam, and then I interview, I took interview, with board of directors. At that time it was only one interview, but nowadays the rule has changed and there are two interviews.

JS: Ah okay wauw. But what I wanted to know was that.. let's say in two years, you are going to start your own company - that's your dream, right? - so how would you get your

employees? Would you also make all these kind of scores or would you do it in a different way? If you had your own company

HW: Maybe..

JS: It's a difficult question, I am sorry.

HW: It is difficult, but if it is small company, maybe I just review the CV and then interview.

JS: Okay so no test?

HW: Yes no test!

JS: Okay because I mean, that's important. If you think it is a problem, then you also have to change it when you have the possibility to do it. In my opinion, right. Good.. So, "Hell Joseon", you heard about it 2-3 years ago.

HW: It is an internet word. Everybody uses that word on internet or website.

JS: But you also use it when you talk face to face with people, friends?

HW: ehm, yes.. I don't use that word, mostly because.. Actually I don't like that word, because it included some disrespect of our country, and I live in this country and I should have some loyalty. But it's a sad story, right?

JS: Sure. I understand where you are going. At one point it is also going against your own nation, and if that's not something you want to do, then.. okay, so mainly you hear other people use it, but you don't want to use it yourself?

HW: I don't want to use that expression, because I decided to.. uhm, I am born in Korea and I'd better, you know, do some action, to change the culture of Korea, rather than using a bad word, right?

JS: Sure! Do you think the word has a power? Or do you think it is just a word?

HW: I think word has power, it shows are trend and youngsters' thought, it's a sad sad story.

JS: Okay but do you think it's.. how can I say this without being.. do you think it's doing something good or do you think it is doing something bad for society, that you have a word like this?

HW: There is two sides of a coin, you know. I think.. I wish old people recognize that youngsters use that word. We should change, for our next generation and like that. It has good part, right? But if old men, old people they don't change, they just ignore it, and just.. they just do the same thing as they do - as they did before - there's no change, and only complaints. Only youngsters complaining and, you know, bad words spread out, because everybody feel the same way, right? Word has power. Yea right, I want.. somebody go out of this country and immigrate to other country, and some people "ahh I want to follow them, I wish.. I want to do same thing" like that.

JS: Do you think the right thing is to move abroad?

HW: Immigration? I also thought of if. I don't know, I am not sure.

JS: Because you have this expression "tal Joseon" - that you are escaping..

HW: Escaping.. if I had children, for education, I wanted to go abroad. But I am.. but, I am not sure. Because it has a sacrifice, like uh, you know. Because in foreign country there is no friend and (laughing).. and also there are some racial discrimination, don't like Asian people. If I go to some.. Canada, or European country, my position will be low (laughing).. lower than..

JS: Oh yes that's.. okay so it has a prize, the prize of immigrating.

HW: But I don't know. Not sure. I heard that many youngsters they leave the country, that is a problem.

JS: That's a problem.

HW: Yes. I am not sure but, if I go to some high position people like a boss or team leader, I want to change it, really change it, I don't want to do the same thing, but being boss.. If I am a boss, it means I survived in this bad culture. And maybe at that time, in the future, I am afraid I will be the same person (laughing) as the boss, right?

JS: ooooh..

HW: Because it means I survived. I survive and I get use to this bad culture, and I am the same person as my boss. I am afraid of it. So, that's why I want to start my own business you know. Before corrupting my inner (laughing)..

JS: .."soul". I have never thought about that. At some point you get into the system, and you become the thing you don't like.

HW: Yes, right? So many good people around me, in the company, they left the company, because they.. they have good performance, but they don't want this bad culture, so that's why they left this company, to start their own business or get another job in the company which has good culture.

JS: Okay, so would you say - nowadays - is it more important to find a job with good working conditions compared to a job with a high status? Like, if you could choose between, let's say Samsung - which has a very high status - or an unknown company, but which has very good working good conditions. What would be the most.. I know it's difficult, maybe you don't know, but..

HW: Many Korean people maybe choose Samsung.

JS: Still?

HW: Yes because they give more value to name, naming. name and appearance, name card! In Korea, that part is very important. Something like boast to other people.

JS: So even though you could get a job with better working conditions - let's say you would be sure that you only work from 9 to 5, you get your vacation, you get paid for overwork, all these kind of things.. people would still chose to go to Samsung..

HW: Yes Samsung and big companies, because yea.. they have more value on name and appearance, that's a Korean thing too.

JS: But what kind of value? I mean, for me it' like.. what can you.. why is it good with the value?

HW: Okay, if I show my name card, which is Samsung or Hyundai, in Korea, you can feel.. everybody admires me. It's Korean style.

JS: But is it important for you that people treat you with respect and admires you? How would you feel about not being admired, or not being treated to respect?

HW: It is connected to true happy, right? But many Korean people still pursue some.. pursue other people's opinion and other people's thoughts. This problem, we should break out of that culture and the thoughts, very old thoughts. But it's not easy.

JS: No, it's always difficult to be the first one. Yes it's very difficult.

HW: But, there is some little bit changes now. Some youngsters, their thought is changed, but still they want to get a big company.

JS: Okay I see. Is there other words that comes to your mind when I say Hell Joseon? Other Korean expression..

HW: Ah connected to Hell Joseon?

JS: Yes?

HW: Hm..

JS: And you can say it in Korean, maybe I've heard about it or.. I don't know, sometimes it's difficult to translate it to English, right?

HW: Hm. Hell Joseon.. Hell Joseon.. I can't think of..

JS: ah okay, that's cool..

HW: ..Hell Joseon is a good word for expressing the..

JS: Yes it's very catchy.

HW: Because Joseon dynasty, right? Because Joseon dynasty has a very bad culture, it's rank society, right? There is "yang-ban" high society class, there is - what is it? - "chungmin" it's the lowest level, but we still live in a democratic society, but we youngsters think there is class - invisible class.

JS: Invisible class?

HW: Yes considering the money, power, something. There's class.

JS: Do you have a word for those classes?

HW: Uh, we call it.. no word, just "chang-yu", it's upper class, and middle-class, and low-class.

JS: So, all though we are in the 21st century, democratic Korea, you think there are still some parts of Joseon?

HW: Yes yes yes, still remain.. the bad cultures still remain, you know, in Korea now. It's a remain of Joseon dynasty.

JS: Yes okay, that's a good point. I have not really thought about that, because on the outside, you know, Korea seems incredibly modern. Sometimes it's more modern and the rest of Europe, high technological.. everything is very, yea, modern. And it's difficult to get under the.. yes well, so that's connected to.

HW: Yea right.

JS: And then the word "hell"? I mean, what is that to you?

HW: Hell? It's "*jiok*", right?

JS: Yes it's just the english expression. Okay, so it's a modern Joseon?

HW: Modern?

JS: Yes I mean, "hell" is a modern word, an english expression, right?

HW: Yes yes "Hell" is an English expression, "Hell" is something like "Heaven", or "Demon" right?

JS: Yes right. Hey, man, I think I've asked you a lot of questions now!

HW: It's okay.

JS: Is there anything more you would like to add?

HW: .. uhm.. I want to.. I want my company, my Korea, you know, my country, should follow the western cultures. Because in Germany they work smart, and western people they don't care about other people's opinion and though, right?

JS: Yes.

HW: But.. I want to change it. If I have some powerful position, or high position, which I can lead other people, I want to change it.

JS: I think that is the right spirit!

HW: I want to be optimistic, about the.. because I don't want to give this culture to other.. next generation, right?

JS: Okay, that's good! (both laughing).

HW: Sometimes I envy the western people, because they have a good culture, but I know, you guys have other worrisome, or something, right?

JS: Well, the trend in Scandinavia these days is actually that we are looking a lot at Korea and China, because we want to be more efficient, right? We think the Korean or Chinese school model is better than the Scandinavian, we think that you are better at math, engineering, technology, so we want to learn how you educate your children. We have a lot of comparisons, a lot of teachers and schools are going to China and Korea to see "how is the structure?", so I guess it's also a matter of the grass are greener on the other side, in some sense. It's always difficult.

HW: Yea right.

JS: Ah, well I am just going to stop it now.

8.8 Appendix 8: Interview with Kyung-jin

Date: 26th January, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Kyung Jin. Initials: KJ

JS: Okay, so just to begin with, when was the first time you heard of the expression of "Hell Joseon"?

KJ: It's funny because we feel like we have always been feeling that, but then, we never found the right term to describe our situation. You know, as most other people in my age, when the term started to be used, when that term kind of emerged, we didn't even try to analyse or try to think the deep meaning, but we just kind of got attached to it. We just started.. it became such an appropriate term, I don't know.. I think, for me, when I hear terms that are used, I mostly try to see the deep meaning of that, and try not to overuse it, but "Hell Joseon" - I think I started using it so often ever since I first heard it

JS: Okay.

KJ: And I feel like that was.. most of the time, when I used it, mostly, that was in 2014.

JS: So three years ago, more or less?

KJ: Three years ago, I think.

JS: And what about today? Is it still as used as it was back then? Or is it not as visible?

KJ: No we use it every single day.

JS: Okay so you never stopped using it?

KJ: No. Because there is no other word to substitute this.

JS: Okay, and what is it exactly you can use the expression to, yea to express? How can "Hell Joseon" express your feelings?

KJ: When.. can I just talk about my personal experience?

JS: Yes sure, that's exactly what I want.

KJ: Because I actually get a lot of comments from people on how surprised they are to see me.. I actually have no experience abroad, but I really liked English, so I started English in Korea, and I never really lived abroad. And yet, I become accustom to so many American dramas, and also I try to watch, like french movies ever since I was young, not because I admire it, but I love the culture of sarcasm. So most of the comedy I like are made in the US.

JS: Ok, I see.

KJ: I really like sarcastic comedy series.

JS: Do you have any examples?

KJ: The office. Do you know that?

JS: Yes sure.

KJ: The office is my favorite.

JS: The American or the British one?

KJ: Oh American one.

JS: Okay because I think the British one is even more sarcastic, a bit more dark.

KJ: I know I know. Also I have my favorite British comedy show which is called Little Britain.

JS: Oh, "computer says no" (quote from Little Britain"

KJ: Oh my god you know that?

JS: Yes.

KJ: I love that. Okay.

(Talking in Korean with the waiter)

JS: What do you do with the garlic? Do you grill that as well? Or is it too much a work?

KJ: Actually, me and my friends put it on a stick and grill it.

JS: Should I do it?

KJ: Yes if you want to. For me it was too much of a hassle.

JS: I am gonna to it with one or two, just so we can try. Okay but anyways. Sarcastic comedies from the western world.. how do you put that in relation?

KJ: Okay, I was always familiar with American movies and TV-shows, but I actually started dating this American guy. Seven years ago, and I was going out with him for 4 years. And that has actually become an influence. Because he really liked sarcastic comedy as well, so he introduced me to so many things, and I got to like so many comics, and I became so identical.. you know how some of the comics, when they say something, it feels like they found me, they showed me the right expression?

JS: Yes they put words to your feelings.

KJ: Yes right. Sometimes it's hard to find the right expressions, but then you see a movie or a stand-up comedy and you kind of get them. So I really think of that as important element in my life. I started to get used to it. You know, I became more and more used to it, so the more I got used to it, the more discrepancy I had with society. Especially as a student who has always been interested in human rights.

JS: Yes.

KJ: When I say I've been always interested in American shows, that also includes all the shows that include gay man as a character, or drag queens.

JS: Yes, some of the more progressive shows.

KJ: And I've always been lucky enough to have no judgement on them or whatsoever. I have never actually thought there was anything weird about them. And I have always been thinking "who I am to support them or not", because they are who they are, they exist, they've always existed, for as long as we've lived. And I'm actually a big fan of RuPaul's Drag Race, if you've heard of it?

JS: That one I don't know.

KJ: It's like a competition for drag queens, and when I am used to all that culture, and see the society where presidential candidates come out and say, "I am not trying to be political, but I don't really know about homosexuals. I have no comments for them", or, you must know really well that Ban Ki-Moon pretended to support them when he was UN Secretary General, but know because he is eager to get any kind of opportunity, he say.. did you actually by any chance hear what he said?

JS: Uhm, in relation to what?

KJ: Like two days ago?

JS: I think I've heard most of what he's been saying, but he's been saying a lot of things, right?

KJ: He said the most bullshit thing two days ago, he said "I support homosexuals' human rights, but I don't support homosexuals" (laughing sarcastically). I translate it literally.

JS: But that doesn't make any sense.

KJ: I know, but that's what he said, and..

JS: Did he say that in a Korean news media?

KJ: Yes.

JS: So he said it in Korean? Right, to the Korean audience.

KJ: Yes but I translated it literally. So actually, when I was thinking of telling you about "Hell Joseon", my personal experience is that my identity.. I really identify myself.

(interrupted by the waiter)

JS: So, you were thinking about telling me?

KJ: Yes yes, when I think about "Hell Joseon", I feel like..

(interrupted by the waiter again. Getting new foods served)

JS: Oh, it looks so good.

KJ: It is good!

JS: You should eat something, I feel like I am stalling your process.

KJ: So, the first thing that came up to my mind was the discrepancy I feel. About this country.

JS: So discrepancy between..?

KJ: Between how I identify myself and the fact that my body is here, and I am Korean, I was born in here, I was raised my whole life here, but then again, I identify myself more with other culture.

JS: Yes sure.

KJ: Not that I always admire american culture or western culture. But, you know, I feel like, because you are dating a Korean girl. I think some of the Korean women who date western men.. I actually thought a lot about it, my first boyfriend who I went out with was American, and the next I went out with was french.

JS: Oh, what is best, the French or the American culture? (laughing) French movies are hands down better than the American ones!

KJ: Well, I don't want to think about them (laughing)

JS: I am sorry.

KJ: No no I brought it up. Anyways, I feel like Korean women who date foreign men have similar cultural background or temperament, I think.

JS: I think you are right. In my case, my girlfriend had already spent half a year in Norway as an exchange student before we met, and she has a lot of european friends, and that's sort of how we met each other, right? So whenever I worry about whether it was about me she ended up in Denmark, I feel pretty confident it was not. It's like, if hadn't been here, she would have been in Denmark..

KJ: Anyways!

JS: Yes, she's always been determined to leave Korea at some point (laughing)

KJ: Did it in any way affect your thesis?

JS: Well, how can I say. In my perspective, it took me a while before I got to know the expression of "Hell Joseon".

KJ: Oooh.

JS: Like, the first half year I spent here, I never encountered the expression. I never heard about it. And, I think as a foreigner, based in Seoul, especially as a student with no real obligations, you are not with family, just friends, and you have so many possibilities and options, so for me it was more like "Heaven Joseon" as an exchange student.

KJ: Yes!

JS: Right? I came back, and decided to study Asian Studies on a Master's level, and started reading a lot of Korean newspapers and books from Korea, and then slowly I met this expression. More and more often, right?

KJ: I see.

JS: And.. uhm, wall street, the new york times, you know great American newspapers using it in their headlines. "something something Hell Joseon", and then I was like, was is this about? Why are you calling your country Hell? I don't get it!

KJ: Ohhh.

JS: Because to me, this was a land of opportunities and so many things going on, vibrant..

KJ: But didn't your girlfriend like.. I am sorry for keep bringing her up, but I am just trying to ask about her influence, because she must have told you about "Hell Joseon", no?

JS: She didn't explicitly tell me about it no, not in the beginning. I think I was the one asking her.

KJ: Ohh I see I see.

JS: And then she was like "now let me tell you". Or maybe I haven't paid so much attention to her when she has talked about it. I think it made a bigger impression, to be fair, when the newspapers starting to talk about it as well, it made it more general.

KJ: I see.

JS: But sure, I knew about issues with Korean society, but I didn't know it was "Hell Joseon".

KJ: I see.

JS: So what it is with the Korean society which is so different than your identity? Was is it that you cannot reflect yourself in? If you can say it like that. What I am looking for are everyday life examples of situations in which you would say "ah, Hell Joseon". If you even do that?

KJ: I feel like I can say so much about it, but then I don't know how to organize it. You said that you wanted to hear about everyday life?

JS: Yes. genuine situations where you would find it (Hell Joseon) useful.

KJ: Genuine situations. The first thing. I think, in daily life, the first that happens is in the subway.

JS: Yes?

KJ: Uhm not because it's in Seoul, but actually I never knew that Koreans are so brusks.

JS: Brusks?

KJ: Yes like so aggressive.

JS: Like pushy, or?

KJ: Yes in their manners overall. I didn't notice that until I went to the US. I was actually doing my exchange student program for three months, when I turned 23, so that was the first time I went abroad and I was kind of choked when I was there, and one day I was trying to get inside a building, and the guy who was inside the building, he was holding the door for me when I was like 200 meters away.. and every time, even they would slightly pass me by, they were like "I am sorry". And what I expect is not that much of courtesy, just a bit of courtesy would be nice. But then here, I feel.. I am actually on twitter, and I kind of babble everyday on twitter.

JS: Oh okay.

KJ: About all the complaints that I have. So I feel like I wrote mostly about the subway, about the manners.

JS: Okay and when you tweet, is that in English or Korean?

KJ: Of course it is in Korean. Because I don't want to.. this is kinda like my private.. and I try to look anonymous, so people don't really know who I am.

JS: So you don't do it as (the informants name)?

KJ: I am doing it more as an angry person.

JS: Yes, I see. I think that's important. You say that you are using "Hell Joseon" in public? In the public sphere, which twitter is today, right? A digital public sphere. But you do it anonymously, more or less.

KJ: Actually, I often feel that I don't really belong in this society, just because what I like and what I prefer. It sounds very vague, but I felt that way. But I was lucky enough to find people who are similar to me. But even when I meet people who are similar, in undergraduate school - university - they kinda all ended up following the right track. What I mean by that.. I am just saying it because you ask me what I feel daily, and what I feel, the part that I don't feel I belong here, I never felt that I wanted to step the right track that Koreans think - getting a job at conglomerates, companies, and getting married, like finding someone good at certain age, I never gave a shite about that, because as you can see, I am a graduate student in sociology. That says it all.

JS: So, sociology is not the right track? Not the right path? But Seoul National University..

KJ: Even Seoul National University.. You know what people told when I told them I was going to SNU doing sociology?

JS: No.

KJ: They are saying like "oh, you are kind of doomed". (laughing)

JS: Really?

KJ: Yes, because they don't see any future in me. And I so do I. I actually don't see any future in me. But I have this very beautified unrealizable dream that I hope I can do someday - so I just applied for it.

JS: And what would that be, that beautified?

KJ: I actually wanted to work at international organizations, because I don't know if you had any chance to hear my introduction (at SNU human rights course) but ever since I graduated my undergraduate, my university, I started working at a refugee support NGO.

JS: I think I sort of remember your introduction but then again.

KJ: Yes yes no one really remembers anyone's introductions.

JS: Yes it was very tense.

KJ: So actually even from that moment, you can see that I was wasn't by any mean, any way in the right track that I was supposed to go.

JS: Sure.

KJ: Because most of my friends were applying for really big companies, and then, at that time, I was working at an NGO getting paid 1.000\$ a month.

JS: For a full time position?

KJ: For a full time position. Which basically means I can't really get my own place. I was only able to work there because I live with my parents. So I was working there for 3 years, and I actually felt really frustrated because I can't really see any changes happening in Korea. Just to slightly talk about migration policy here, it's mainly run by the government. There's not much room for grass root NGOs. That's how I wanted to work at bigger NGOs that could have more power.

JS: Yes more influence, okay.

KJ: Yes, that's the background of how I came to dream about that.

JS: But your major is, just to specify it, I am sorry I don't remember, but what is your major?

KJ: My major, in university I majored in English literature, and now at SNU I am doing sociology. But we don't really have sub-major.

JS: Okay, but what is the name of the program?

KJ: It's just the sociology department.

JS: Okay, and how long time is that?

KJ: Two years.

JS: Okay and then you become a Master of Science in Sociology?

KJ: Yes. Master's degree in sociology.

JS: Okay, I think it's the same thing in Denmark. It's just called sociology, and then you can choose to go one path and look at one thing, because sociology contains so many things right? But overall, on your paper it just says sociology.

KJ: I actually wanted to do migration studies, but I was a little bit worried to go abroad right after I quit my job, that's why I wanted to do Master's first in Korea, and then go abroad, maybe, if I can.

JS: You really should meet my girlfriend, she's graduating in migration studies in Copenhagen.

KJ: Really?

JS: Yes international relations and migration studies.

KJ: There might be a lot to learn from her.

JS: But she also feels a little bit lost, because in general that field is.. it's pretty difficult to find a job afterwards, migration is not so sexy, not so well paid.

KJ: That's why I told you people see no future in me.

JS: Yes but that's migration and refugee studies, then you have sociology as a major category, and at least in Denmark it's very respected and highly appreciated.

KJ: Oh hahah, I wish that was the same. I should tell you this anecdote. My friend wanted to get married, and he had no women around him, so he kind of ended up registering himself.. have you ever heard about this company that matches you to get married?

JS: Yes, but if you could just explain it for the record,

KJ: So there are couple of companies that, if you register and pay like 1000\$, they evaluate you to a certain group.

JS: Based on what?

KJ: Based on occupation, based on your income, your height, your..

JS: Oh, it's also physical?

KJ: Yes, every element of your..

JS: Also family?

KJ: Yes, basically every element of yourself. Your family members, income, occupation, height, look, university degree, where you went, which school you went. So he ended up registering himself, and he was actually doing sociology in undergraduate. So they classify you in nine grades, and he was ranked 9th grade.

JS: Because?

KJ: Because he's doing sociology. And he told me that he was in the same criteria as farmers in Korea.

JS: And no offense to a farmer, but..

KJ: I know, right..

JS: And what university did he graduate in sociology?

KJ: Sungkyunkwan, Sungkyunkwan University which is considered to be one of the good schools, like Seoul National University, Yonsei, Korea University..

JS: So the SKY, and then you have?

KJ: Sungkyunkwan and sogang.

JS: So a second tier?

KJ: Yes, and then he's the same as farmer. He actually told me in such a bittersweet way, that I was like "Oh my god, I shouldn't do sociology", but then I ended up doing this. But anyways.

JS: I think it says a lot about your personality, that although you know all these things that works against you, you still end up doing it.

KJ: I can't help it!

JS: And you shouldn't, don't help anything.

KJ: Well my parents also knew that, and.. actually I think the way I act this way, is a lot because of my parents. I would say there are not as typical Korean parents. They have never forced me to do anything, that's why I just ended up doing this. I am sorry if my structure is all scattered.

JS: No sorry that's what it is supposed to be.

KJ: I was kinda worried, because I was wondering if you wanted to meet someone who has patriotic feeling about this country.

(I dropped my chopsticks)

JS: Sorry what did you say? You were worried that I wanted to meet someone very nationalistic, or?

KJ: Yes who had yet positive feelings about this country, because that would be more interesting. Because in this time, I can't seem to find anyone who has positive evaluation of this country.

JS: Okay. I guess.. do you think you can say "hell Joseon" and at the same time have some sort of positive image of Korea?

KJ: No.

JS: No? But can you be nationalistic and say "Hell Joseon" at the same time? I am just trying to provoke you here, right, because..

KJ: It's interesting.

JS: Because you still want the best for your country, right?

KJ: No. for me no, but I can see where you are going.

JS: It's like, we all have our different views about what our country should be like. It's not because we hate it, it's just because what hate what someone else have made it into. In my interpretation. So I think you can be nationalistic and at the same time use the expression of "Hell Joseon" actively.

KJ: I see.

JS: In order to change it?

KJ: But interestingly, exactly about that part, I noted that president Park Geun-Hye despises that term, "Hell Joseon", because her viewpoint about this country is so positive and yet "Hell Joseon" always destructs that image of Korea, so..

JS: And how do you think other people in her generation perceive the generation?

KJ: I actually.. I don't really had a lot of chance to meet people in that age, but.. because I am sociology major I got to read some of the papers that divided people by generation, like teenagers, people in 20s, 30s, 40s, and obviously people in their 50s and 60s who are like her, they actually have negative feelings about that term. Because they have.. you must have heard about this a lot. It's the country that they built, it's the country that they fought for, and

they feel they contributed a lot, and they don't like people speaking bad about it. It's kind of natural for them to think that way. So most of the surveys do feel that they criticize the way people use "Hell Joseon" so much.

JS: So they feel offended?

KJ: Yes.

JS: But in terms of your own parents for example, you said they were a bit alternative or a untraditional, have you ever talked to them about Hell Joseon? Would you use it in their presence?

KJ: Actually, it's really interesting you ask me, because I never really used the term "Hell Joseon" but I am really open to talk about my complaints about this country a lot to them, and every time I do they actually agree with me. My dad used to be really conservative, but when this impeachment happened, he actually, he's the one who got drastically changed in his political view. Because he worshiped, my parents both worshiped Park Chung-hee.

JS: Oh yes.

KJ: Because you know they are the generation, they come from the generation that he saved this country, who belief he saved this country. And they had so much hope and faith in her, because it's his daughter, so it was really interesting to see both of them turning their political view right after the.. actually my dad had certain phase in denial, he actually didn't watch the news, which he always watches every day.

JS: So he kind of shut down.

KJ: Yes he didn't want to face the reality, but in the end he admitted that it is wrong.

JS: But that's just the political. I suppose for you, "Hell Joseon" is way more than just the fact that you have a political scandal going on?

KJ: ehm to talk about how they view my future, in terms of "Hell Joseon", I think they.. my father actually had a lot of hope of me, at first..

JS: Haha "at first"..

KJ: Yes because it's embarrassing to say this, but I did go to one of the good schools in Korea

JS: Well that's not embarrassing at all.

KJ: And I went to.. and my major was this english literature which was one of the most popular majors, so he thought that I would instantly get a job, like he thought that I would be a translator, because I was actually interested in doing that job while I was in high school. So when I started working at that NGO for a few years, we actually had several talks. He said "what are you doing now?", "why are you wasting your degree like this?". I actually don't think I tried hard at that time to persuade him, because I had so much confidence in what I did and I had so much love for my job.

JS: You just did it.

KJ: Yes I just did it. And over time he kind of admitted "that I do like that job" but then I think in recent, two or three years, he was watching the news and he finally realized that it is actually hard to get a job. And he acknowledged the fact that if I ever got a job at big company I would end up having shitty boring life, but he knows me enough that he told me "I know you", "I know you don't want to live with that boring job", so from two-three years ago, he started telling me that "you should study more, and that would become like a stepping stone for you to go abroad, and do international job that you want". And he actually told me ever since I was in high school not to marry a Korean man. Because he knows me so well, and he was always testing me like.. so he gives me a situation "(KJ, if your husband ask you to fix breakfast in the morning, will you do that?", and I was like "why the fuck do I have to do that?", and he actually sighed when he first asked me.

JS: Like, "oh, this is going to be difficult"?

KJ: Yes, "she's not.."

JS: But at the same time I reckon he must be proud as well? I mean, that's why he test you right, to actually see that you did have your own will and..

KJ: Maybe.. I don't know. I think the first time he asked me he literally wanted to see if I will ever ever have a chance to get marry.

JS: When did this happen?

KJ: Like five years ago, four years ago. But you know, I am 27 so when I started having serious boyfriends he would ask me. But then he told me.. I actually, the first he told me not to get married to Korean men was when I was in high school, and then when I actually started dating American, he kind of got the sense that "she will never be able to meet Korean men".

JS: But isn't that a little bit stereotyping Korean men? Are all Korean men the same?

KJ: I actually wanted to tell you about this before I came here. I have a serious problem with, Johan. I actually, even though I am studying human rights, and I value human rights, I have a very contradicting thing going on in my mind. Since last year, or two years ago, I started despising Korea men. Hahah, sorry.

JS: No, don't be, as long as they (the Korean men sitting around us in the restaurant) don't understand what you are saying. Don't get unpopular in your favorite restaurant, I want you to come back.

KJ: It's become problematic actually, because my thesis is actually xenophobia.

JS: Yes, oh..

KJ: Yes, (laughing), and I am the one trying to study hatred towards a certain group, and I am the one who suddenly develop this weird hatred towards men. But interestingly, I am not the only one.

JS: I heard about this feminist group, megalian?

KJ: Yes, megalia.

JS: Yes, and their articulation and word usage, like they made "ajoshi" into something..

KJ: "kejoshi"

JS: Yes, "Kejoshi".

KJ: Dog + "ajoshi"

JS: And there was another one as well, like making men into some kind of bacteria.. I can't really..

KJ: Oh, "hannamchung"

JS: Yes! Sorry, this was a bad strategy. But yes, exactly, those words. So okay, that's a movement, that's a trend.

KJ: Have you read.. do you know this news media called..

JS: Korean exposé?

KJ: Yes yes, Korean exposé wrote brilliantly about that.

JS: That's where I heard about it.

KJ: I actually got impressed by that as well. Just to tell you about my personal experience, I always never had a good relationship with Korean men. Like, not romantically, but even when I met them in university.. I know it's bad to generalize them, but I can't help generalize, I can't help generalizing them because they all end saying such a gender role.. I am sorry, my english is really bad.. I am actually very famous for creating fights with Korean men.

JS: Oh, you have a record of.. that's something we could talk a little bit more about, if you want to?

KJ: Yes, whenever, when I was thinking about "Hell Joseon", when I was thinking about what to talk about with you, that was one of the main subjects I was thinking about. Because you have no idea how that become my main subject whenever I meet people. Most of my female friends, whenever we meet, we don't talk about life. We talk about the discoveries that we started to feel, ever since we got this feminism education. Obviously we have women's rights courses in university.

JS: Sure, did you also participate in that course we had with the female professor on gender roles?

KJ: No I was doing..

JS: Oh you were not there? She was pretty radical, in a nice sense. But at the same time, due to her, now I am judging her, right, but due to her age, I felt that she was also a little bit bound by her own background, and her past. There was a lot of interesting discussion with her and she was a bit contradictory or paradoxical in her.. we talked about division of females in universities, having strictly female universities and why that is still a necessity in Korean society today and there was a lot of very interesting contemporary discussions.

KJ: JM actually told me about it, she filled me in.

JS: Yes exactly, and she did not agree with her that we still need gender divided universities. But that's another discussion. Anyways, you came from saying that you've been taking classes of feminist movements or women's rights?

KJ: Yes yes we actually call it women studies.

JS: Not gender studies?

KJ: Yes, "*yoseong*" is women. But even though I took that class like five years ago, I don't think I was sensitive enough, until last year. Last year became such.. I think.. I can't represent every women here, but still I think last year became such an important year for us. Ever since last year everything changed for me, like I said earlier, my friends and I we don't really talk about "so how was your day", we talk about "so a few years ago this guy told me this, and I never realized that was "*yohyom*"". You know "*yohyom*" right? "*Yohyom*" actually emerged from last years movement, it's literally "hatred towards women".

JS: Okay, "*Yohyom*".

KJ: Yes, it's an abbreviation of "yo-son-hyom-oh" - "hatred towards women". I do have a lot to talk about it, because the term is not really appropriately used, but still, not Koreans in my age, whenever people say gendered or stereotypical terms, expressions, we say "yohyomman", "that's *yohyom*".

JS: Okay, so it is sort of similar to "Hell Joseon" in some way that it.. if you have a situation related to Korea as general society, then you can use "Hell Joseon", but when you have something more related to gender issues, then you can say "*yohyom*"?

KJ: Oh no no no. That's not really the same, because "*yohyom*" is more for the particular act of discriminating women, so.. for example, there is a columnist in chung-ahn daily news and he.. when Emma Watson did a speech at UN, he wrote a column about how she should be more quiet. She should focus more on developing herself rather than talking about feminism. We said, that's "*yohyom*" discourse.

JS: Sure. Wauw, that's a very important element in this whole..

KJ: Well I do have some complaints about it, because "*yohyom*" is almost like misogyny, to translate it, but for certain comments that discriminates women, it's not really hatred towards women like misogyny.

JS: It's more just acting out on your stereotypical perceptions. One thing is being hateful, another thing is being naively trapped in gender perspectives.

KJ: That's right.

JS: I think there is a difference between hating someone and just doing something because of.. without making that an excuse!

KJ: That's right. That's why I have complaints about it. Because hatred is different thing.

JS: Yes it's a strong expression. But "Hell Joseon" is also a very strong expression.

KJ: You think so?!

JS: Hell. I mean..

KJ: Hahah, yes but we've always felt that way. Actually that's also interesting, because when you say.. I remember you were talking about "Hell Joseon" in class, and saying that calling a country "hell" was choking to you. But for us, it wasn't actually choking at all. I also wanted

to recommend you this paper on way here, because I was taking, in my sociology department last year, one class I talk was about modernity in Korea. How scholars regard modernity in Korea.

JS: Okay.

KJ: And actually, my professor told me that the way people describe "Joseon", the end of "Joseon" era, and the way people describe now are basically the same. So he was like ""Hell Joseon" isn't really a new thing"

JS: That's gonna be, if I can say that already, one of my main conclusions. You could have said "Hell Korea", you could have something else, but the reason why you chose "Joseon" and not something contemporary is because of the strikingly similarities between the feudal society, 200-300-400 years ago, and the contemporary 21st century today, right?

KJ: It's interesting!

JS: Yes, and now I've almost already put words into your mouth, but what are these similarities? This may be a very leading question, if someone reads this transcript.

KJ: No no it's quite.. for me it's quite difficult to explain, because I personally never really marinated on Joseon Dynasty, I spent more time marinating on Park Chung-hee era.

JS: Yes that's the same thing for me, I have basically no knowledge about "Joseon". I only know post-division of Korea.

KJ: Just to talk about it really superficially, I would say it is highly related to the fact that Park Geun-hye is president. Because even though she has the title of president, she was basically acting like a king. Which we used to have in the Joseon dynasty.

JS: Ah yes.

KJ: So we would see this oppression we never saw.

JS: But Lee Myung-bak, he was not.. or, what's the difference between him and her?

KJ: Yes that's what I am trying to say.

JS: Oh I am sorry.

KJ: No it's okay. So we feel that Lee Myung-bak wasn't any different from her, but he decorated himself so well as a successful entrepreneur, so he never really gave us the impression that he's gotta control everything. He represented himself as a very uh, democratic liberal person, but then again he had a lot.. I am sorry, I don't really have much vocabulary to this.

JS: Yes but it's also very difficult to put words to this, right?

KJ: I would simply say, he wasn't really authoritative, from my perspective.

JS: Okay so you can run a wrongful policy without being authoritarian? That would be my impression of him. So the difference between Park and Lee would be the authoritarian.. ?

KJ: I think so. It's mostly because.. at least Lee myung-bak was able to host press conference. I am sure you are aware of this. Just to simply put it, we have never seen this kind of person, in my whole life.

JS: Yes that is very unique.

KJ: Yes a president who doesn't want to meet journalist. Lee Myung-bak actually polished the image very well, because he provided certain convenient systems for us. That's why even I am aware of all the evil things he did, it's really interesting when we evaluate him. Because he was the one who made this whole bus system. You know about it right?

JS: I just know the bus system. But I don't know.

KJ: This blue bus, green bus, he was the one to align everything and organize everything.

JS: Is that just in Seoul, or whole Korea?

KJ: Only Seoul. But still.

JS: But I am glad you brought it up, this thing with Joseon and the link to today, I think it's very useful.

KJ: I am just sorry that I don't really have much knowledge about Joseon dynasty to compare.

JS: No but the thing is, you are still an active user of the expression, so although you haven't studied the Joseon dynasty in detail, you still have a perception of what Joseon means, and all the connotations it brings with it. And of course, you will never be representative, but you still sort of have an idea of what Joseon means to the younger generation.

KJ: Ah, now that you bring that up! Joseon dynasty for our generation is like.. I think I said the right thing. The reason why people relate now with Joseon is basically because it's an authoritative society. Joseon dynasty for us is, whenever we watch drama, we would always see people who are so afraid of talking about anything about the society, the king says everything, the king orders everything, and people just obey to it. Of course we did have very democratic king, like "Sejong", but that was just a short period. Most of the kings were, they didn't deserve to be king. Basically.

JS: Okay and that's another interesting thing you are bringing up. So you say that your main knowledge about the Joseon dynasty emanates from watching TV dramas? Or what are your sources? In a mainstream sense.

KJ: TV dramas.

JS: TV dramas?

KJ: Yes.

JS: What about history classes in public school or literature or family epokes, anecdotes, you know, who is pushing forward this narrative of the Joseon dynasty? Who's the main narrator?

KJ: I think that is really important question, but obviously I can't be representing everyone, but my main knowledge comes from.. of course we talk in history class, but the way we become with the Joseon dynasty is obviously from TV dramas. Because there have been so many TV dramas about Joseon Dynasty, and the more we got to know, actually, I actually

didn't like Joseon dynasty because of the oppressing environment, and I was actually comparing Joseon dynasty with "Goryeo".

JS: To the previous?

KJ: Yes because I heard that Goryeo era women's rights or women were more respected. They had more power than men.

JS: Okay you think more than today?

KJ: Ah haha no.

JS: Okay, so in a sense it was good, got worse, and then got better again, or what?

KJ: Actually I am very embarrassed to talk about past history.

JS: Noo.

KJ: Because I feel like foreign students are more knowledgeable in Korean history.

JS: I have no, absolutely no knowledge about Korean history. I am sort of an atypical student of Korean studies, right? I don't watch Korean dramas, don't watch TV, I only read Korean news, that's it. So I have no knowledge about TV dramas, I would never dream of watching it. But could you explain me, what kind of TV drama.. because you have modern types of dramas, taking place in contemporary society, and then you have these very historical TV dramas?

JS: Like I said, I don't really watch.. Like I said, I watch American shows, so I also don't watch Korean dramas, but there used to be really really popular TV dramas when I was growing up. It actually had like a rate of 50% viewers rate.

JS: Oh that's incredibly. Was it was KBS?

KJ: uhm NBC, also a main broadcasting system. And it's interesting, now that I talk about it, they became the main source for .. I heard that people in the middle east right now are watching it.

JS: Yes, Danish people as well. That's how I know it. Because I am taking "hangul hakyo" (Korean school) in Copenhagen..

(interrupted by the waiter)

KJ: The dramas I watched with Joseon dynasty background was mostly about a doctor in Joseon dynasty, there was a drama about him, and the other one was about a chef, not a chef, because women couldn't be a chef, but one of the kitchen assistants who ended up becoming a doctor. That would be one of the famous TV dramas in Korea ever.

JS: It's kinda ironic right? The fact that you have a mainstream pop-culture sort of worshipping the Joseon era.. to me, that could be one of the reasons why you also chose to sort of criticizing Joseon now, because now you have a rather detailed idea about how gender roles was, how power structures were during the.. it seems like you have been sort of moulded by the mainstream and now you are breaking free, in some sense.

KJ: Uhm I wouldn't say I was moulded by mainstream tv, it's strange because those dramas at the time were regarded as.. hm.. if you didn't watch those dramas at the time you couldn't have conversations with your friends.

JS: Okay but that's even more than mainstream, "too stream" even "extream".. Okay so this generation, your generation, who were exposed to the mainstream culture telling the same story about the Joseon dynasty over and over again, is also the generation that has chosen to use..

KJ: ohhh, now that you mention it, I am just realizing..

JS: I may be.. concluding things already.

KJ: No no no, it's really interesting, because until I talked about this with you, I never realized I was so familiar with Joseon dynasty background dramas.

JS: Yes and it actually seems like.. you still have it somewhere behind (pointing at the head), stored.. not a trauma, but something similar right? A national feeling of having something in common.

KJ: Yes.

JS: Wow, it's deep.

KJ: But obviously you wouldn't generalize, but..

JS: Yes this is as qualitative is it can be. I mean, as research. This is just one story out of thousands and millions of stories, but yes.. I have to deal with methodology after.

KJ: Yes that must be a hard one.

JS: Yes I don't know yet how I am gonna deal with it, and also.. I am using this book about interviewing, and there are like two perceptions about how an interviewer should behave during an interview, there is like two metaphors or anecdotes, of what an interviewer is. So one is a gold miner, he has a mic - which would be the dagger - and then he goes to a mountain or rock and starts hitting it with questions, and every time he hits it, a result falls of. And this is something tangible. this is something factual, something objective. You have the gold here, and the miner here. And then you have another metaphor, a traveller. like a nomad. A person who travels from town to town, to society to society, and tells his owns stories and engages actively in conversations, and from that he gains knowledge.

KJ: I see.

JS: And in regards of those two metaphors, I am quite sure I am the last one.

KJ: I am just so sorry, because my way of talking is usually so scattered.

JS: Yes but that's great, I am very content with it. The other thing is so pretentious. I ask you one question, you answer me, I ask you a new questions, you answer.. it's just so systematic, I don't like it. I want something impulsive, something.. And genuinely believe that the data is not your data, it's not my data, like the findings, it's findings were are producing together, by having this conversation. That's what makes the result. And that's what I will write in my methodology, so now I have kinda already outlined it. But, anyways. Going a little bit back to your feminist ehm..

KJ: Yes I actually wanted to talk more about it because that's how I mostly regard this society as "Hell Joseon", mainly in terms this disparity between men and women right now.

JS: Okay and when you talk to your girlfriends, is that a common perception? Or is it your very personal.. does that make any sense?

KJ: it does make sense, and I am debating how to answer.

JS: That's good.

KJ: Because uhm, Johan I am not trying to explain that I am different, but I was always classified as a very minority in Korean society, so obviously my friends are also like that. So we would always joke about this. So whenever there is a national election, we think that our facebook friends, at least when we look at our facebook friends, we feel like the Green Party will win. But then, the green party never even..

JS: Made it to the assembly.

KJ: That's what happens and we would always joke about ourselves of we are so surrounded by people who are the same as us.

JS: That's how Donald Trump also won. The democrats the thought "everyone is like me" until you find out you just don't KNOW anyone not like yourself.

KJ: Exactly.

JS: In that sense, we are so uniform. And that's why social media is so dangerous, at least to predict outcomes. But yes, it's good you bring it up.

KJ: Well, that's why my friends and I have this online community that I go to. And most women there have the same perspective that I have. Basically what my friends, including me and the women in the online community think is that we are doomed. We are destined to live by ourselves, because Korean men are shitty. There are several reasons to say this way: first of all, they don't comply with our gender roles, to say first. Some of them, few of them might be lucky enough to get education from their home or public education that there is no certain gender role. But we were not lucky enough to meet them, so we have no idea whether that kind of man exist. So we obviously predict that when we meet Korean men, it's inevitable to meet a man who expects us to fix breakfast every day, or fix dinner every day. Just because we are their wives. And the second thing, we despise the fact that they use prostitution so much. I am sure you heard about it.

JS: Yes we actually discussed it last week. For some reason we narrowed it down to this topic, and we found out that, what was it..

KJ: What do you mean with "we"?

JS: Oh me and some of the other course participants. I think one guy started talking about male prostitution, and then we ended up talking about just prostitution in general in Korea, and we googled it, and found out like these horrifying statistics of how many men would visit a prostitute within a week, or within a month, and it was like 1 out 4 or 1 out 5. And as far as I remember as well, 5 % of the GDP is accumulated in this industry, as, what do you call it, under economy, black economy.

KJ: The statistics I know is that Korean men has the highest rate of using, doing prostitution. And I actually wrote on my twitter, that I wish there was a radar-system to detect whether he used prostitution or not. Seriously, who would want to fuck a guy who has been..

JS: .. paying someone

KJ: Yes, but here.. it's really interesting, because some of the male friends that I have, they tell me these things about their co-workers. They are all working at big companies now, and most of their colleagues are married, and even have children, and yet after work they are always the one who are dragging to go there, to go to prostitution.

JS: Would that be the so called "room saloons"?

KJ: Not even room saloons, just going straight to have sex. a room.

JS: But how does that become a group thing? How does that become something your co-workers.. because I've heard about these room saloons as a gathering point for men. If you want to do business, you basically cannot avoid going there. But to me, and I may be very ignorant in this area, but to me there is a difference in going to a room saloon and going to a prostitute, right?

KJ: Right right right.

JS: Because obviously you cannot do group meetings at a prostitutes place.

KJ: From what my friend analyzed, that's their entertainment. So it's not really for them to gather, but rather.. like sort of an entertainment they can all enjoy at the same time. My friend is not working in Seoul, he's working at a bank in a suburban area. Because it's even more isolated place, they justify themselves that there is not much entertainment as in Seoul. So after work, they would gather and go to that prostitution. My friend told me that there is a place where women are designated in each room, waiting in one room. So they go there as a group..

JS: .. and do their thing.. come out again, and..

KJ: I don't know if they come out as a group or go separately, but he was raising the point that they never see it as a problem. For them, it's such a cultural thing.

JS: Sure. I am interested in it from a male perspective as well. Do you think, by any chance, that some of these men who are included in these statistics, do you think they would perceive this culture equally as "Hell Joseon" as you would? Do they feel sort of trapped as well?

KJ: Trapped by what?

JS: Trapped by this culture, by this uhm.. are every one doing it voluntarily? Or is it something that happens because of peer pressure and such things..

KJ: with prostitution? I do think peer pressure affecting it, because my friend told me this story.. actually my male friends, fortunately they have never used prostitution. Some because there are christians, and others because they have girlfriends, like committed relationships. And my friend told me that when he refuses to go, they immediately tell him that he is a coward.

JS: Okay so he is also some sort of victim of this very chauvinistic discourse?

KJ: He was able to avoid every time because he said he had a serious girlfriend. But then again, those who are persuading him are the ones who are married (laughing)

JS: And that makes their arguments very invalid.. which is horrible, right? Okay so from your perspective, this is like a major issue when it comes to..

KJ: .. "Hell Joseon". For me, this is "Hell Joseon" because I have no men that I want to meet. And not even as a romantic relationship, even as a person, to think that a man would usually have experience in prostitution and the fact that even though they are in my same school, doing the same thing, to think that they would have certain roles in their mind, that disgust me. Because my worldview, my viewpoint is so different from them. And I have no courage to persuade them. And I don't actually know what to do about that. Because before I used to be really like enthusiastic, I used to have this mind to talk to them, persuade, see what they think.

JS: Hence all the fights?

KJ: Yes exactly. All these fights derived from the fact that I would like to know why they would say that kind of things, why do you think that way, was does it mean?

JS: Okay what kind of things? I think you have to give me at least one example of one of these encounters.

KJ: Oh I fought so many times. For example, there was a guy that I met at my former workplace. He spoke really good french, because he was studying in France. He studied in France for about three years, and you would kind of have the assumption that if you studied abroad, you would perhaps have more open views about the world.

JS: Horizons are widening.

KJ: Yes, broad perspective. But then, he and I were talking one day, and he said that "oh Korean women, don't they all want to end up getting married to guy? And stop working? Isn't that what they want?"

JS: Oh that's dangerous.

KJ: He said that so casually, not even aware of how fucked up that it, and I was like "why would you say such a thing?" And he was actually interrogating me more: "don't you want that as well?"

JS: But did you.. did it sound like he only had this perception of Korean women or..

KJ: Korean women! He specified: "Korean women, they look like the wanna have jobs, but they all, in the end, what they want is ending up getting married to a guy". And this is actually correlated to what I wanted to tell you. I am sure you are aware of this, but there is a website called "Ilbe".

JS: Yes, at some point I was thinking about reaching out to them. But then my girlfriend started persuading me to stop wasting my time. Because she thinks they are sort of beyond..

KJ: .. having normal conversation..

JS: Yes she would call them psychopaths. But I would say, "everyone has their opinion and there sure must be a reason why", but I kinda got away from it.. but now it could actually be..

because I asked her, who are these members of "ilbe"? Are they low class or high class, are they Seoul citizens or non-Seoul citizens, and apparently it seems to be all kinds of people.

KJ: Yes. Do you know what? I wanted to tell you. My friends and I, the fear we started to have from last year is "what if he is ilbe?", the person who we used to know for a long time, or just started working together with, or any men who we encounter, we started having this implicit fear that "what if he is ilbe?". That's almost like.. i don't know.. that became our cautionary act.

JS: And what is, just for the record, what does it mean for a man to be "ilbe"?

KJ: Ilbe.. being on ilbe is, you basically don't consider women as human, as an equal human being.

JS: Okay, and is it a community or is a..

KJ: It's a community. But uhm, to talk about this I actually have to talk about a whole discussion about it..

JS: Yes I feel like you have mentioned for several times now that something happened a year ago?

KJ: Yes, that's because last year was the most controversial year for ilbe because ilbe as you might have heard of, used to be just a very ordinary community.

JS: Yes and no, I did not know that. The origins of the..

KJ: "ilgan-best", it's an abbreviation of "ilgan-best", it means "daily best", which means they are basically collecting clips of movies, or clips of comics, or cartoons.

JS: Oh, you know 9GAG for example?

KJ: Yes yes yes.

JS: Okay so sort of like a community where you share funny things?

KJ: Yes just like that, but then it became a monster one day. I am sure there is a well organized article about that.

JS: Yes I will try to dig into that. But how did it develop then, how did it become?

KJ: Can I find the article, because there are certain articles that I saved in my archive?

JS: Sure, you can send to me later, or is it in Korean?

KJ: I can find one and send it to you.

JS: Yes that would be helpful. So, a year ago?

KJ: I am hesitating because there are so many elements combined to turn into a monster, so I don't know where to begin.

JS: Okay so instead of telling about the development just try to tell what is it now? You said it was about sharing things online?

KJ: Yes yes, so last year it became a very active community of despising women. It is actually a discourse related to "*kimchinyon*", that actually developed from the community.

JS: oh so they made this?

KJ: That actually created megalia as well.

JS: oh wauw. It's a wild map we have, everything is..

KJ: Yes. There's a really good paper about ilbe but it's written in Korean. He actually became really famous for writing this paper, he actually went to sociology major at SNU.

JS: So you CAN be famous. It's possible (laughing)

KJ: He analyzed ilbe members' discourse about hatred towards women, so yea it became like such an influential paper. But anyway they developed this discourse of hating women. And then they started representing this far-right political opinions. And then last year they became really famous for criticizing the family of sewol-ferry victims, they were the ones mocking the family of sewol-ferry victims. They actually held a demonstration when one of the sewol-ferry victims' family was doing a hunger strike, demanding the investigation of the case. And because he was doing hunger strike, ilbe members gathered and they were eating chicken right next to him.

JS: Oh fuck.

KJ: (laughing) it's just the tip of the ice.

JS: So that's something beyond just hating women..

KJ: It literally became a monster.

JS: Yes I see. It has several heads, right?

KJ: Yes, so we actually came to know this existence of "hanam" which means Korean men, from ilbe. And actually..

JS: It means a bit more than just Korea men, don't it?

KJ: Yes, certain Korean men. Can we sort of move to another place, I think the owner wants us to move.

JS: Yes sure.

(walks a couple of minutes without microphone on while looking for a new café)

KJ: Maybe I can just organize and send you a message.

JS: No you don't have to.

KJ: Yes because I feel like I have so much that I want to say but then it's not really organized.

JS: No it doesn't have to be.

KJ: But I actually just thought about the "Kimchinyon". Obviously, because it's a term created by an online community, there's no..

JS: .. right or wrong?

KJ: Right definition. Obviously it's accumulated all the definitions are accumulated and transformed, and "*doenjangnyeo*" I would say is the original term, that created "*kimchinyon*", but "*doenjangnye*" used to represent, I would simply say women who hold Starbucks coffee. Men used to criticize women holding Starbucks coffee because they.. they criticize that women are wasteful. spending too much money on coffee, on expensive bags, they spend too much money on how they are represented. That's the term they used to criticize women, but then "*kimchinyon*" developed more, with connotations. It actually has more despicable connotations because it represents women who rely economically on men, but then again they would emphasize equal rights, but only when they are in difficult situations.

JS: ah okay, so selective gender equality. Does it imply any sexual connotations as well?

KJ: I don't think so.

JS: Because we talked about the gold-digging, and that would usually be young female finding an old man with a lot of money and then you sort of fuck your way up the ladder.

KJ: Yes I do know that term, but I would say this is a bit different from that of a gold-digger. Because "*Kimchinyon*" is more a term to describe the majority of women in my age.

JS: Oh, okay.

KJ: They don't really call "*azuma*"s "*kimchinyon*".

JS: Sure so there is a difference. So what is the "*azuma*" that a "*kimchinyon*" is not? How can we distinguish?

KJ: "*kimchinyon*" is actually used more for our generation, because it has to do a lot with dating culture. So "*azuma*", you know "*azuma*" right?

JS: Yes yes I have my own little impression.. the perm-short hair, very sticky elbows..

KJ: Exactly.

JS: But in a sense also a very strong woman, in my opinion. Someone who is getting things done, who knows what she wants, quality wise, she is bargaining, independent in some sense, I would say. But maybe that's me putting too much into the expression, seeing it as a foreigner.

KJ: Actually, in Korea "*azuma*"s are not regarded as women. The way you described how independent they are.. independent would be the last way to describe them. They are described more as an aggressive sort of like a human being who gave up to be a women.

JS: To become something else like?

KJ: They are regarded as human beings who are, even though they are women, because they have to be so strong, like raising children and surviving in this society, that all their feminine components are evaporating.

JS: Okay that's interesting! I think I know where you are going at. So they gave up their.. femininity or whatever you call it? And what is that? But they gave up on themselves,

basically, on their own needs. Is that one way to say it? That they are working for something else than themselves? Or..

KJ: Basically in the society, people who has children they are regarded not as a woman but as a mother.

JS: Okay and there is a strong difference between being women and..

KJ: "*azuma*".. you know, the fact that we have a term for being a married woman itself is quite..

JS: Yes, I never really thought of it this way. So a married woman is an "*azuma*" which is a person who sort of transcended into something beyond being just a female.

KJ: Yes. You know the way people describe the "*azuma*", someone pushing and..

JS: Yes but you don't necessarily have to give up on your.. they share a lot of features with what we would describe a strong individual female within the Scandinavian society. And then again, there is such a big difference too. But some of the characteristics that comes along with the term "*azuma*" in my opinion is a thing we also strive for. This thing we knowing how to bargain and knowing I want my right!

KJ: So that's considered very independent?

JS: Yes but the thing is, now I realize, they don't do it on behalf of themselves, the "*azuma*" does not do it on behalf of herself, she do it on behalf of someone else.

KJ: For family.

JS: Exactly, whereas the strong and independent female character in the Scandinavian countries is mainly doing it to achieve her own.. and I guess that's the biggest difference.

KJ: Right, now that you mention it.

JS: Because I would joke with my girlfriend if we went out, and we buy a jacket for me, I clearly remember this, I bought it and put it in my bag without looking at the jacket, I tried it and bought it and they gave it to me, but she would take it up again and go through the whole jacket for the stings, just to check if everything was okay with the jacket. And then I would joke with her and say "oh you are being such an "*azuma*, you really know where to look at the details, you have strong sense of not giving a fuck, to be honest, I want my right, I wanna make sure that I am getting the product I am buying, like "I am not this week customer". So to me it actually came with a very positive connotation. But now it's slowly changing.

KJ: Yes "*azuma*"s in this country there are like the most mocked and ignored group of people just because how they are, even though they became that kind of existence by the society, people never really try to think of how they became that way, but rather they just think "poor azumas".

JS: SO they are also very objectified in a way.

KJ: Yes exactly. That's why not being an "*azuma*" at a certain age can be such a privilege, such an advantage, because "oh you are not like those typical azumas" that's like the biggest compliment ever. Which is really bittersweet.

JS: But that also gives me a notion of.. the fact that you distinguish so much between being married and unmarried and having a child / not having a child. I mean, to any man and any woman in the world it means something to become a parent. it changes you.

KJ: right.

JS: But it does not necessarily mean you are giving up on your own life, because you are getting a new life. But what I sense is that you have a clear distinction between pre and post giving birth, and pre and post marriage, whereas I am pretty much used to "okay we get a baby" and then the first month or year you pay very much attention to that child and then after a couple of years then "ah we can go to vacation", "we can go out friday night" as well, like I can continue living my life as I lived it before I became a father or before I became a mother.

KJ: That's really interesting.

JS: But it seems you are not really on the same terms, to say it mildly.

KJ: I feel like if I wasn't born into this society, then I would have had different views, like yours. But here, even my friends who are my age, not necessarily friends, but even people in my age who got married, they suddenly define themselves as "azuma", and that justifies themselves as being aggressive.

JS: But that's martyrism. You know, people who are martyrs. like sacrificing themselves, it comes from a very biblical expression. You give up your life to carry out the words of God or something, and these days you have suicide bombers within the muslim community, radical islamic. Politicized religious, they would also be considered as martyrs. So people who sort of die in the name of their ideology. And then you can make yourself into a martyr, that everybody is pointing fingers at me, the fact that I am being branded or.. there is a sociological expression (stigmatization), I can't remember it. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy, that you think everyone thinks you are a thief, so you become a thief. Because anyways, anyone thinks I am a thief. It's pretty abstract.

KJ: I feel like I can understand where you are going. Actually I wanted to talk about this as well. One of the elements as I consider this country as "Hell Joseon" could be discrepancy between my generation and my parents generation. This huge gap that we have, obviously in other countries as well, people would feel that gap, but here it feels much more severe because men in my father's age, and women in my mom's age, they are both considered "kejoshi" and "azuma", they are represented by that term.

JS: That's true, they are both being put into a..

KJ: Yes in a certain category. And it's related to what you described about "azuma", they feel very betrayed by society because they consider themselves as sacrificing existence, they have put all their effort and money into their children, but then for example, men in my dad's age they sacrificed too much that they never spent time for their family, and when they ended up retiring, this lost phase of their life, they lost how to communicate with their children. And they feel isolated, and there is no way to save them, because he was never home, and he is still living in the past. So actually didn't used to have good relationship with my dad as well, because the way he thinks is SO confined in past history, that I have no idea where to start, to even persuade. But I thought I was the only one facing this difficulty, but then again I started talking about this issue with my friends, and my friends surprisingly had.. every girlfriend that I met they all had similar stories like mine.

JS: So, daughter-father relations.

KJ: Daughter-father relations yes.

JS: And have you ever heard about any other, like son-father or son-mother issues?

KJ: Not that I know of, because I mostly talk about this with my female friends. And my female friends they all seem to have similar difficulties with their fathers.

JS: Do you ever think that fathers tend to be jealous at mothers who got to spend time with their children throughout most of their lives.

KJ: Hmm that's really interesting, because that can be applied to my own family. For example, I am very very close to my mom, and I have a very close relation to my younger sister. So the three of us can bond so easily, we have separate KakaoTalk (chat) group, so we would always talk about everything like all the single time. And my dad, he isn't really workaholic, I don't know the expression, but he doesn't know how to be interactive.

JS: Okay.

KJ: He doesn't have any skills to..

JS: But that could just be normal introversion?

KJ: No no he is very extrovert. As long as he is with his friends. But he doesn't really know how to communicate with us. For example he doesn't know how to say sweet expressions. He used to have very strict gender roles, and that would make our conversations more and more difficult, because I am not the person who just agrees with parents. I always question them, "why do you think that way?" "why would you say such a thing?" so I used to have a very bad relationship with my dad, I used to fight with him all the time. But like I said earlier, he also started watching more news, acknowledging this generation exist, like my age, like me. I think he's slowly.. it's in progress, but he gradually starts to understand people in my age. He was actually the one who criticized me for studying human rights. Because he said that, and I am quoting exactly, he said "studying human rights is such a wasteful thing, because you are being ungrateful".

JS: Ungrateful?

KJ: Yes because "back in the days we didn't have times to think about human rights. And now that you guys are living a good life, now that Korea reached a certain economic level, you suddenly have time to think of human rights", that's how he would criticize. So whenever I would criticize Park Chung-hee, he was always saying, "you should have lived my time".

JS: wauw, that's.. and at the same time, you kind of understand where he is coming from, right?

KJ: uhum.

JS: That's a really difficult situation.

KJ: It was, for a long time, because as you already know really well, human rights sometimes can be considered as such a privilege like something that wealthy people have some much free time that they think about human rights. At least that's how my dad's perception was, I think.

JS: Yes for some reason it's always perceived as something that comes after economic development, right?

KJ: Exactly.

JS: Like you need to have bread on the table and light in your room before you start carrying about whether you are allowed to express yourself or not. Something like that. It's the same thing you hear about China these days. "who cares about human rights and democracy, all we want is to be saved from democracy", right?

KJ: Exactly.

JS: But for some reason i've always tended to see it from the other way, that you need some basic human rights before you can achieve.. but it's the discussion of what comes first, the chicken or the egg. And what is the result of the other. It's also a very sensitive issue.

KJ: We are more accustomed to think that way, because of the era of Park chung-hee, because he was the one to lead this culture of thinking that human rights comes later. Economy comes first.

JS: But at the same time, knowing just a little bit about Korean history, I mean, not everyone were satisfied with.. and so many people went on the streets, right? And in the end, it was the result of the majority of the population actually pushing for change, that Chun Doo-hwan went down, and you actually implemented a democratic system, so at the same time, that's not your generation, that's your parents generation?

KJ: Uhm a little younger, younger than my parents. That's why, I actually wanted to mention that earlier, I mentioned a paper about generation.

JS: Yes and their sentiment towards..

KJ: .. political views, 40s and 50s turn out to be rather liberal. They are actually the same age as my professor, so people who are in their 50s. So in Korea, there is even such a huge difference between 50s and 60s.

JS: Right right. So, for every president you have had, there is a new generation..

KJ: Yes basically.

JS: I am trying to categorize it. You have 60s and 70s Park Chung-hee, and then Chun Doo-hwan, and then Noh Tae-woo, and those are more.. during those dictators, people are in the between, your generation and your parents generation. So you have a transitional period.

KJ: That's right. They are relatively liberal because of that certain period.

JS: And maybe because they are not old enough to experience Park Chung-hee and Korea before Park Chung-hee, like poverty and stuff like that. They were kind of born into a mid-level society.

KJ: Yes, and I also read that part in that paper, that people in 40s and 50s they are not necessarily progressive, but at that time, the social culture was so.. that progressive phenomena was so dominant that they had no choice but to join that culture. actually my professor from last semester, he was working on a paper "what drove the demonstration during the Chun Doo-hwan administration?" "what made people gather?", because he doesn't

think that everyone at that time were political progressive. There must have been something that made them gather, he said that scholars have such difficulty finding what that was.

JS: Yes those you would classify as followers, or someone who just did it because other people did it. But that's also a very black/white way of looking at things. Because surely they must have known what they went into, and they also did it with their own body, knowing this could cost them. So it wasn't free just to sign up for demonstrating, as it is more or less nowadays. It's a shame that I can't do a broader.. it would be interesting to ask this middle-generation and your parents about how these expressions, to sort of come around the whole thing, but that would take like forever I guess.

KJ: Analyzing by generation could be really risky and complicated so I wouldn't recommend it.

JS: Maybe the perspective should be a little different perspective. Just asking "what do you feel you gave up?" something like that.

KJ: Yes but then again what I mostly felt last year during my first master's program in sociology department was, I remember I was thinking every day "this is a great country to study sociology, this is like the most fucked up period".

JS: Yes (laughing) from an academic perspective.

KJ: Yes to study! Because that famous paper about ilbe came out two years ago and that inspired me to do master's in sociology, and actually my personal thesis will be about xenophobia, as I said. So this Korean hatred towards some certain group, suddenly it became visible from last year. So that's why I started thinking "this is such an interesting time", because it's the most depressing, but from an academically soul..

JS: Yes from a cynical point of view it's incredibly interesting to be alive in.

KJ: It's incredibly affluent, you know.

JS: Yes exactly, I know what you mean. I felt the same way, just to digress again, when I was in Denmark and knowing I was going to Korea in January, and I was watching all the mass demonstrations week after week after week, I was just sitting there and hoping from a very evil perspective..

KJ: hahah that it would continue..

JS: Yes continue, so I could be part of it. Because I have never taken part in anything so vibrant to perspective, so I hated myself for thinking that..

KJ: No!

JS: .. and at the same time I was also hoping that this would be over in a month and we would have a peaceful transition of power, but.. from this little..

KJ: Yes I see what you mean.. you are from a country that most Korean policy makers admire. I am sure you must have had not this level of disturbance in your country.

JS: Not really. I mean we are a country known for striking and demonstrating, but also we are such a small country, right? When things happen in Copenhagen, we are maximum half a million in Copenhagen, it's just the masses that were accumulated in Gwanghwamoon, it's

just impossible to imagine as a Danish person because we live in a empty.. so from a quantitative perspective, if i've been participating in a demonstration in Denmark, it's been on such a small scale, maybe a hundreds or thousands, but never hundred thousands or millions, so..

KJ: I think it's also interesting, just to put it very simply, to compare demonstrations that happened in Chun doo-hwan administration and these days. It's a huge difference, a huge change in how this became a cultural event. People are not that serious, not like..

JS: Tense or angry?

KJ: Yes they are just.. they are angry, but..

JS: In a positive.. I was there the first week when I arrived, but that was not even close to be as many people as before, but still around 50 or 100.000 people or something, it's still a lot. But it was a very friendly atmosphere, people bringing their kids right? It almost seemed like a small theme park, people standing with food and you could almost see people trying a little roller coaster - you couldn't, tho - but the next step would be to turn it into some kind of festival. But that was also very giving to for me, to experience how positive you can engage in these kinds of calls for change, that it doesn't have to be with tear gas. But it's also because I suppose because the police and military system has changed, they kind of allow it now. I know that was an old farmer last year who got killed by a water cannon as we talked about, but luckily it's sort of a rare incident these days. Without knowing too much about it, I think you also have a political environment that allows for positive atmosphere during demonstrations. Or not? Have there been any violent encounters so far?

2 hours 13 minutes 25 seconds

8.9 Appendix 9: Interview with Jung-hee (Without recording)

Date: 8th Febraury, 2017

Interviewer: Johan Schoonhoven. Initials: JS

Interviewee: Jung hee. Initials: JH

Information about the interviewee

- He is a under-graduate student at Yonsei University in Interior Design
- He is studying philosophy too
- He was born in 1993
- He lives in Seoul

JS: When was the first time you heard about “Hell Joseon”?

JH: Must have been around 3 years ago, when I came back to Seoul from military service

JS: Where did you hear it?

JH: I think I met it in a national broadcaster, being an element of an analysis of why young people would use that kind of expression

JS: **Would you say it was in a negative light then?**

JH: Yes, that's how I remember it

JS: **Would you ever use "Hell Joseon" yourself?**

JH: I understand where it comes from, but no, personally I don't use the expression. And when my friends tend to use it, I try to tell them not to. They kind of know now, that they shouldn't use it around me.

JS: **Can you try to explain me why?**

JH: I think it is wrong to use the word Joseon. Joseon represents something from the past – a strong sense of Confucianism – where's today's problems are of a different character.

- I think a lot of Koreans are misinterpreting the meaning of Confucianism

- By discrediting Joseon Dynasty, we are denying our own history and values and adhering to a Japanese narrative of how "Backwards" Joseon was, as a reasoning for the legitimacy of colonization and modernization.

JS: **Can you give me an example of when you would hear the expression being used?**

JH: Uhm, for example one time my friend went abroad to study, he said "goodbye, now you are left in this Hell Joseon while I am leaving it. Enjoy."

- That's one example of I argued with my friends over using that expression.

JS: **So, if your friends would have said "Hell Korea" or something third instead of Joseon, would you have used the expression?**

JH: Yes, I guess so. in general, I recognize the issues related to Hell Joseon, but I believe it belongs to the contemporary society, and not the past.

JH: And still, I think it is hypocritical to use so strong expressions, without changing anything. A lot of people are complaining about life, but they still continue to do things in the normal way.

JS: **Could you describe with issues you think are related to Hell Joseon, or "Hell Korea", just to use another expression?**

JH: In general I think it is related to hierarchies in society. And then it seems like we are trying too hard without getting anywhere, it doesn't pay off anymore. There are also issues related to gender discrimination.

JS: **And those issues you just mentioned, weren't they also existing during the Joseon Dynasty?**

JH: Well there were problems, that may seem like it is the same, but they were different. Linked to the context of that time. For example, I think gender there were more gender equality during the Joseon dynasty compared to now. And the hierarchy was natural back then, when we had clear divisions of servants, farmers, and royals. Today it is more invisible,

and you no matter where you look, you will find class divisions. It is not something unique to old Korea.

JS: So, if it has nothing to do with the past, then let's try to look a little ahead instead. What kind of change do we need?

JH: Today South Korea is a very isolated country, almost like an Island. We don't like China, we don't like Japan, and we are also divided by North and South. Our economy is very isolated too, with too much protection and not enough contact with the outside world.

The reason why I don't think Hell Joseon is a good expression, is because society has lately changed. We have had economic development, and now we live in a golden age. But we have not changed behavior, and that is the real problem. We all strive for the same path, the same things. The same education, the same jobs, which creates competition. We don't need those things anymore. The entrance exam, the "suneung" is a good example. We need to change it, because it prevents people from learning and thinking properly.

JS: You mentioned the military earlier? What is the relation between the military and "Hell Joseon"?

JH: It seems there is no direct relation, but i think everybody who wants to understand korea should consider the military service very seriously. Because it is quite unique. As you know we are divided into two countries and every man get instructed to think north is bad, poor, stupid because they are communist. In other words we should have good perspective toward usa. This is also such a tragedy in korean history. We made our government not by ourselves but by usa. There is also the word "*cheonjokuk*" which means usa is paradise comparing with hell joseon.

I think the army has strengthened the idea of Korea as a "Hell" rather than being the root of the problem.